



# OWEN: A WAIF



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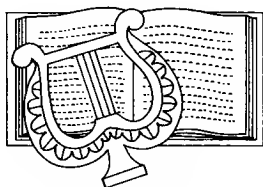
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OWEN — A WAIF.



# OWEN — A WAIF.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“CARRY'S CONFESSION;” “MATTIE, A STRAY;

“CHRISTIE'S FAITH;” “HIGH CHURCH;”

“NO CHURCH.”

“What a waive and stray is that man that hath not Thy marks upon him.

DONNE

NEW EDITION.



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# CONTENTS.

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## BOOK I.

### CONTAINS THE HISTORY OF ONE STEP.

CHAP.	PAGE
I.—MARKSHIRE DOWNS - - - - -	I
II.—“TARBY” - - - - -	10
III.—RIGHT OR WRONG - - - - -	27

## BOOK II.

### TRAGEDY IN HANNAH STREET.

I.—“92” - - - - -	37
II.—A STEP FORWARDS - - - - -	51
III.—REFORM AND RELAPSE - - - - -	58
IV.—TEMPTATION - - - - -	66
V.—THE NEW AND THE OLD - - - - -	75

## BOOK III.

### BATTLE-GROUND.

I.—SEVEN YEARS - - - - -	83
II.—A LADY PATRONESS - - - - -	98
III.—THE CHERBURYS OF ANSTED - - - - -	105
IV.—THE YOUNG GUARDIAN - - - - -	115
V.—OPPOSING ELEMENTS - - - - -	122

## BOOK IV.

### DISCORDIA.

I.—WHAT OWEN EXPECTED - - - - -	130
II.—ARTHUR GLINDON - - - - -	141
III.—WHAT OWEN DID NOT EXPECT - - - - -	146
IV.—THE PAST COMES BACK - - - - -	156
V.—MOTHER - - - - -	161
VI.—“THE OLD STORY” - - - - -	168
VII.—THE FIRST PARTING - - - - -	175
VIII.—THE SECOND - - - - -	184
IX.—THE LAST CHANCE - - - - -	194
X.—OUTWARD-BOUND - - - - -	202

## BOOK V.

## RECORDS MANY CHANGES.

CHAP.	PAGE
I.—ONE STEP BACKWARD - - - - -	210
II.—A YEAR'S RECORD - - - - -	218
III.—MARY - - - - -	228
IV.—A CHANGE FOR MORE THAN ONE - - - - -	237
V.—“TIME FLIES” - - - - -	248
VI.—THE NEW TARBY - - - - -	263
VII.—GUARDIAN AND WARD - - - - -	269
VIII.—MARKS PROGRESS - - - - -	276

## BOOK VI.

## CAST ASHORE.

I.—“OWEN'S HELP” - - - - -	293
II.—THE HONEST DISTRACTION - - - - -	306
III.—THE OLD COMPLAINT - - - - -	317
IV.—THE RESULT - - - - -	330

## BOOK VII.

## HOW THE STORM ENDED.

I.—TROUBLED WATERS - - - - -	341
II.—OWEN AND MARY - - - - -	348
III.—A FORLORN HOPE - - - - -	353
IV.—TARBY'S MISSION - - - - -	360
V.—COUP DE THEATRE - - - - -	368
VI.—CLEARS THE STAGE - - - - -	382

# BOOK I.

CONTAINS THE HISTORY OF ONE STEP.





## OWEN:—A WAIF.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### MARKSHIRE DOWNS.

**L**UCKY the rain had kept off so long from Markshire Downs; for Markshire had been holding its annual cattle fair thereon, and it was not a pleasant place to be caught in stormy seasons. The wind and the rain had always done much damage there, and old Markshire folk considered the wet season set in regularly at fair time. It was a wise dispensation that the cattle fair occurred on the first week of September—when the corn was in, and the harvest beer drank, and the harvest junketings ended. It always rained at Markshire Fair, people said; and people no more went thither without their stoutest boots and most weather-proof habiliments than Markshire folk would go to church in their Sunday's best without a baggy cotton umbrella, by way of weather guard. But this particular year in which our story opens the weather-wise had been balked in their prognostications, and people had prepared against the fury of the elements in vain; there had been sunshine on the Downs all fair time, and, though the wind had blown a little fresh occasionally, yet it blew from the right quarter, and the aborigines were not too particular. Lucky the rain had kept off so long then from Markshire Downs. So genial a fair time had scarcely been known by "the oldest inhabitant;" there had been an extra attendance of sexagenarians and

children in consequence, and brisk buying and selling, and exchanging and swindling, had been the order of the day.

What that the rain came down when the last Welsh colt was sold, and a wretched animal of eighteen years, with its teeth scoured, and its tusks filed, remained still a dead lot on its owner's hands, the *bonâ fide* cattle fair was at an end, and the drinking and quarrelsome evening that invariably wound up the proceedings was an illegitimate appendage, only countenanced by a nondescript crowd and a few Markshire roughs. Sober people had wound their way down the steep hill to the town, and their respective villages lying five, ten, fifteen miles beyond the Downs; and those who had stopped to revel and get drunk after the day's business deserved a wetting for the nonce, and there was no honest Markshire soul to pity them.

It rained hard and it blew hard; revelry and up-hill work, and even getting drunk under a canvas roof, which kept the rain off for five minutes and then let it down all in the lump, was dispiriting and grew monotonous. People who knew Markshire gave it up at last, and, despairing of fair weather, made a dash homewards, and left the Downs to the tent-keepers and cattle-dealers. Had it remained fine, or been even moderately wet, the nomadic, heterogeneous classes up there would have been melting away by degrees in the night's darkness, and the morning sun would have discovered but a few crazy skeletons of booths. But it was a terrible night, and those most anxious to be gone thought twice about it, after a glance at the black prospect beyond the feebly-lighted, miserably-dripping canvas tenements.

There were no signs of clearing up, and men and women resigned themselves to circumstances, and made the best of it. Standing, at eleven o'clock at night on the Downs, a few paces from the scene of all the day's life and strife and barter, an observer might have fancied, from the dead silence, and his inability to distinguish objects in advance, that not an atom from the great cattle gathering was left there, and that the Downs were free again to sheep flocks. And yet there were all the elements of life and life's discord beneath half the soddened tents—the world has a guilty conscience, and can sleep not.

There was life—and restless, unsettled life, too—in Jack Archer's tent, where the rain came in with less affectation, and the wind swooped underneath with no ceremony at all. Jack Archer was not a particular man himself, and did not like his company particular. His was not even a respectable

tent, but a sort of tent-of-call for all the black sheep that a cattle-fair collects together. A decent coat, a clean face, linen of anything under a month's wear, would have been out of place therein. There were even some cattle-dealers who preferred to give it a wide berth ; and the rural constabulary, represented by half-a-dozen mild young men, whose trousers did not fit them, ran for their lives another way whenever the rumour of a fight in Archer's tent got wind. And they fought often and with vigour there, and Archer's tent was always lively in fair time.

But the fair was over, and Archer's tent participated in the general gloom, albeit all life was not quenched out by the night's deluge. A woman was awake, at least, and moving uneasily from one part of the tent to another, amongst men and tables, and even horses and donkeys, varying proceedings by now and then lumping heavily on a form, or struggling with the canvas screen before the opening, and squeezing a damaged bonnet through an aperture too small for it in the vain endeavour to find signs of clearing-up—an operation not always received with cordiality, or even common civility, by those trying hard to sleep, as it let in no end of extra wind, which threatened to have the tent up by the roots.

"If you do it again, I'll pitch you out by the scruff, by —— !" roared Jack Archer, who had been dozing on his extempore counter under a pile of horse-cloths, previous to the woman's last attempt to ventilate the place—"you and that devil's imp of yours ! If I stand any more of this, mind you, I'm —— !" and Jack Archer's oily oaths slipped from his lips one by one, till sleep and beer fumes gained the mastery.

The woman dropped the canvas screen, and stood with some appearance of defiance, looking back at her reprover. There was a lantern on the counter near Jack Archer's head, and its feeble light indicated two wild eyes glittering neath the shadow of the bonnet. The light showed little else, it was so weak, and struggled so hard for existence with the elements. The woman was tall, and poorly clad, and hardly sober : one could see the first, guess the second, and have little doubt of the third, as she moved uneasily back, and went the whole length of the tent with an irregular tread, pausing once to steady herself at a table, where three or four men sat huddled together all asleep, and snoring, and holding in their grimy fists, short, heavy-handled, shabby riding-whips.

There were, at least, twenty persons in the tent, all of whom, if not asleep, had lapsed into some semblance of quiescence, with the exception of this troubled woman. To and fro, to and fro, she paced uneasily after the last remark of her un-



courteous host, pausing now and then to make sure that the rain continued unabated, without risking further indignation by reopening the tent.

After half-a-dozen turns, or thereabouts, she walked to the darkest corner of the tent, and groped about the grass and the legs of morbid donkeys with her hands, till she met with a bundle of rags of some kind, which she shook roughly once or twice.

"Owen," she whispered—"Owen, are you asleep?"

To which question silence responding in the affirmative, she rose and re-commenced her peripatetic exercise.

"It's better as it is—it can't be worse," she muttered, after a time. "What's the odds to him or me, for that matter?"

This assertion not appearing wholly satisfactory, the woman finally dropped on to a form, and took her chin between her two hands, and moaned a little.

"Can't you sleep?" asked a voice, so suddenly at her side, that the woman started.

"No," was the sullen response.

"You won't try—and you won't let others, more tired, and more inclined than yourself, sleep either."

It was a mild reproof, and in a woman's voice; and the first woman looked hard into the murky atmosphere before her, and could make out something wrapped in a plaid shawl, sitting with its back against something taller that snored.

"People who are miserable, or sick of life, or anxious to be gone, don't sleep," muttered the woman, either as a moral reflection or as a half-apology, according to the humour of the party addressed.

"You have been pretty merry all the fair, too."

"How do you know?" was the short enquiry.

"I haven't been here with my eyes shut all the time."

"Oh, you're one of the 'cute ones, perhaps!" said the woman, with an awful bitterness. "You've a living to make, and bread to earn; and I've money to get drink with. We can't all be up in the stirrups at once."

"Ah, no! Try and sleep a bit now, will you?"

"For your sake or mine?" asked the other sharply.

"For both, perhaps."

"Then I sha'n't!"

"Very well," said the other, yawning. "Oh, dear! how cramped I am!"

"You should have minded your own business, then," said the restless woman, as though cramped were the natural result of intermeddling, and served her right accordingly.

The woman in the plaid shawl, who was evidently not in

clined to quarrel, returned no answer ; but seemed to huddle closer to her companion for more warmth and comfort than his back afforded.

"The idea of asking me to sleep !" commented the woman, who could not shake off an aggrieved subject, and evidently treasured an indignity—"of asking me to sleep in Markshire !"

Her late interlocutor continuing taciturn, she had all the conversation to herself.

"Why, I was born here, my good woman ; had a father and mother here, who both went to the churchyard—broke their hearts about me, fools say ! I saw their grave last Monday. What a sight for one like me to come and see at fair-time !" and her hand smote the table angrily.

"Hush, hush ! Don't make a noise—you'll wake the people !" cried the other.

"Ah ! well, I don't want that, mind you. All's fair with me, and I don't want that. Oh ! this rain !"

"Are you in a hurry to be gone ?"

"I can't sit waiting here. I'm a mad-woman at heart ; and my brain won't steady down—it turned when I was younger by a good ten years, and well it might for that matter."

"Don't shake the form so," said the woman, in a hasty whisper, glancing nervously over her shoulder.

"Oh ! you're all *don'ts* !" was the peevish rejoinder ; "as if I cared for them, and hadn't been hardened to them years ago. Say, don't make up your mind to drown yourself in Markshire river ; and see what I shall say, or how you'll balk me !"

"Why, you never ——" began the other, and then stopped and laughed a not unpleasant musical laugh. "Ah ! you have been drinking too much. You'll feel better in the morning, if you can only sleep a bit ; do try, now !"

"What, in Markshire !" scornfully cried the woman again.

"Yes, to be sure. What's to hinder you ?"

"I'll drown myself, by all that's holy—I can't live !"

"Well, for a woman who is quite certain about that, you are rather particular as to the wet," was the somewhat sarcastic remark, as the plaid-shawl made another effort to collect a little extra warmth in its folds.

"You're a bit of a pert hussey—that's what you are," retorted the woman ; but the pert hussey aforesaid had made up her mind to be lured no further into conversation ; and the half-dozen acrimonious observations that followed failed to arouse her from her apathy. The woman even relinquished the attempt, and shuffled to her feet, and recommenced her

weary walk, once stopping before the bundle, and whispering Owen as before. Owen slept, however; and the woman, after muttering something over him—a prayer, a curse, a warning, a dreamy soliloquy having no sense or object—either or all four, for what could be learned from the few words whispered in that dark corner—went with the same vacillating gait to the front entrance, ripped suddenly from top to bottom the aperture that had been closed by a needle and pack-thread late that evening by John Archer, licensed to sell beer on retail, and passed on to the Downs, admitting at one fell swoop the torrent and the wind, which blew over forms, and whisked off Dick Archer's fur cap, and the lantern, and swelled out the tent and cracked more than one of the tent cords, and woke up three-fourths of the sleepers in dismay.

“Jack! Jack! the tent's coming down!” cried more than one voice, whilst the earliest aroused were hurrying to and fro, and Jack Archer, foaming at the mouth, was leaping unprofitably in the air, and hurling maledictions at the world and its eyes and its limbs generally. It took several minutes to organise these startled atoms, and bring them to something like use for the common weal, and secure the tent, so far as circumstances permitted, against a similar repetition. It broke up rest in general for that night, and the ill-wind blew extra customers to Archer's double X, and made many thirsty and noisy, and hindered sleep in the few who were inclined that way after the first alarm had subsided. There was but one who, amidst it all, slept soundly and peaceably on—who, in the first tumult and confusion, had for a moment looked from his rags like a young wild beast cub from its lair, and then subsided quietly down again; and he, perhaps, had the greatest reason to evince alarm at the incidents of that night.

For the mother who bore him, the reckless woman of the preceding hours, who had begged and stolen for him for nine years—perhaps had taught him to beg and steal for himself—had shaken him from the shadow of her wing, and cast him a waif on the world.

The woman, planning her escape either from him or from the life she had grown weary of, had muttered, at an earlier hour, “It's better as it is—it can't be worse!” and possibly affairs could not present a more forlorn aspect, or turn out worse for the waif. The world had been ever before him, and met him with a hard, unpitied countenance—the face of a Nemesis revenging his appearance on a society that hates *such things*!—and the mother had been a

strange woman, who had not loved him, or taught him what love was.

Will he wake to much despair when his nine years are startled by the information that he is alone in the world? Would he have cried out with much agony in his sleep had he dreamed of the dark river, and seen the woman he called mother standing irresolutely on the brink, in the searching wind and rain?





## CHAPTER II.

### "TARBY."

**T**HE wind lulled half an hour before sunrise, and the rain came down more steadily. A cold, incessant rain, that gave no promise of clearing up for that day, and suggested to all loiterers the expediency of removing to more habitable quarters.

Life woke early that morning, and proprietors of booths and drinking tents were hammering away at uprights, and stowing away their large bales of canvas long before the night's shadows had crept down the westward hill reluctantly. Cattle-dealers brought forth their surplus stock from unaccountable quarters, and trotted away; carts and waggons, and houses that went on wheels, were disappearing down the hill. Some broken bottles and loose straw, some cut-up turf that would take till next spring to replace, would shortly indicate alone the site of the great fair, which had been the pride of Markshire since Queen Bess, of blessed memory, granted the charter in 1567.

At seven in the morning Jack Archer's tent was level with the ground, and his customers divided, and Jack Archer himself was harnessing a lank horse to the shafts of his cart, whilst a ragged boy of nine years old stood with his hands in his pockets shivering and watching the operation.

"Aint you anything better to do than stand there?" enquired John Archer, adding force to his enquiry by a jerk of the left elbow that rendered *there* somewhere else on the instant.

"No, I haven't—and keep your hands to yourself."

"Why don't you be off after your mother?" growled the man. "If it warn't your blarmed mother that let the wind in

and nearly split the tent in half last night, I'm a innocent. I only wish I had kicked the couple of you out before the rain began, that's all."

The man made a suspicious movement with the reins ; and a pair of sharp eyes taking note thereof, their owner sauntered to a respectful distance, and left John Archer to proceed with his arrangements unobserved. There was something cool and easy about this boy, singularly in contrast to his years—a bold, unabashed, almost defiant air, partly, mayhap, an inheritance from his mother, the greater portion thereof the natural result of such stern teaching as the world's experience had afforded him. On the Downs, in the midst of strangers, with his mother absent and himself hungry, he appeared unconcerned and at home—caring nothing for the rain that soaked through his scanty clothes, and looking as sharply round for stray morsels of bread and meat from those who were dashing through a hasty breakfast, as the half-starved mongrels that waited on their master, and showed their teeth at each other and at him.

Each minute after sunrise noted a departure and a decrease in the numbers on the Downs, and by eight in the morning there were not twenty people left to keep the deserted boy company.

From that small congregation a woman in a gray plaid shawl called to Owen.

"Here, young one—I want you a moment."

The boy, after a suspicious glance towards her—"to be wanted" was a suspicious phrase, and suggested many unpleasant reminiscences—walked towards the woman, who was seated on a costermonger's barrow, with an umbrella over her head, carefully screening from the wet two large artificial roses in her bonnet, of which she was evidently a little vain. At the head of the barrow, engaged in a little dispute with a donkey, that objected to be backed between the shafts, was a tall, round-shouldered, bullet-headed young man in fustian, whose first glance towards the boy was on a par with the looks he had already met with in his pilgrimage.

"Where's your mother, boy?"

"I don't know."

"Haven't you seen her this morning?"

"No—I haven't."

"Oh ! good Lord, Tarby !"—addressing the gentleman at the head of the vehicle—"if she's been and gone and drowned herself, as I was all along afeard on !"

"Get out !" was the scornful reply to so extreme a supposition.

"I told you how wild and skeared-like she was last night—like a lost thing, Tarby."

"Wo ! back, you blackguard !" cried Tarby, who, more interested in his donkey than his companion's remarks, was becoming excited over the animal's refractoriness. "Poll, this is a hanimal to come nine-and-twenty miles for."

And Tarby tapped the animal's head hard with a cudgel.

"But, do listen awhile, Tarby, to this. Something ought to be done—somebody ought to be told, you know."

"It's no business of ourn," said Tarby, regarding the boy with more intentness. "If the young shaver's mother can't take care of herself, we can't be bothered."

"What's your name?" asked Mrs. Tarby, turning to the boy.

"Owen."

"Owen what?"

"Owen nothing. I've got no other name."

"What's your mother's name?—she had one, I suppose?"

"Madge they called her—that's all."

"Where do you live?"

"Mann's Gardens, Tower Street."

"What !—in Lambeth?"

"Yes. We lived there till the rent-man turned us out, and then we came on here. Do you think mother's drowned?"

"I don't know—God forbid, boy !"

"She said she would do it last week," he remarked, coolly.

"And what did she think was to become of you?" said Mrs. Tarby.

"Oh, she never thinks," was the answer, accompanied by a short laugh—"more do I. How it rains !"

"Aint you hungry?"

"Rather," was the emphatic answer, and the keen black eyes looked round for something more substantial than words to follow the enquiry.

"Tarby, I think we'll give him the rest of that loaf," said the woman, with a timid glance towards her lord and master. Owen glanced anxiously in that direction also ; it was a matter of importance to know what Tarby thought of the suggestion.

Tarby, having harnessed the donkey, evidently stood reflecting on the matter.

"Times is bad !—we've parted with the old mare, and come down to donkeys, Poll ; and meat's on the rise, and we're three weeks back with the rent, and—and the damned winter's coming !"

And Tarby's face, pitted deep with the small-pox, took a darker and more swarthy hue.

"Times is bad, Tarby," the wife remarked ; "and perhaps half-a-twopenny-loaf would make 'em badder if we gave it all away at once. It's astonishing how fine we have to cut it sometimes."

This, the reader will understand—the reader who has not had any opportunity of studying Mrs. Tarby just at present—was polite satire, intended to touch Tarby to the quick ; for Tarby, last night, had not been full of such economic thoughts and had consumed rather more than a gallon of beer in Jack Archer's tent, despite the objections of his better half to the proceeding.

"Give the boy the bread, Polly," said Tarby, after a pause ; "perhaps he *is* hungry, the young warmint."

Polly produced the bread, and Owen, with an unceremonious half-s snatch, proceeded to despatch it, regarding Tarby, meanwhile, with increasing interest.

"I know *you*," he said at last, with an artful twinkling of one eye—"I've knowed you ever so long."

"Oh ! have you ?" was the quiet reply ; "I hope you'll know your manners some day too, and understand what thankee's for."

"Thankee's for the bread—I forgot !"

"You're welcome, boy," said Mrs. Tarby, heartily, "I wish there was more of it."

"Ah ! so do I—just," was Owen's reply.

"And so you know *me* ?" said Tarby, looking down on this shrewd specimen of human nature ; "where did you see me last, I wonder ?"

"In the station-house, last Whit-Monday. Oh ! wasn't you drunk !"

Mrs. Tarby, who had no fine feelings, laughed at this ; and Tarby's visage relaxed, as he gave a nervous twitch to a lock of straight hair behind his left ear.

"That's a neat memory of yourn—take care on it," said he.

He was sitting on the shaft of his barrow a moment afterwards, gathering up the reins in his hand.

"I wonder what you wanted in the station-house," said Tarby, after a moment's pause ; "you wasn't big enough to get drunk, and then go fighting like the holiday folks."

"I got hungry, and took some cheese off a shopboard ; and the man saw me."

"You'll be a credit to society when you gets bigger," said Tarby, dryly.

"Will you give us a ride off the Downs ?" asked Owen.



"Bless your impudence !"

"I'm no weight ; feel how light I am !"

"He is a little fellow," commented Mrs. Tarby ; "if our Jemmy had lived, he wouldn't have been unlike him, Tarby. Don't you see a look of little Jemmy in the eyes there?"

"I can't say as I do," said Tarby, without looking for the resemblance indicated. "Jump up, will you?"

"*Me !*" cried Owen.

"Ah ! just for a while ; it's hard on the new *moke*, though. Come up !"

They were rattling and bumping along the Downs, towards the narrow chalk road that led therefrom, down, down by many a circuitous turn and twist to the level country, and the London road. Owen sat behind on an empty basket, enjoying his eleemosynary meal ; and the excitement of an unlooked-for lift on his journey.

Mrs. Tarby, accustomed as she was to London boys—to those precocious specimens whose home is the streets—sat and looked with no little interest at this youth, perched on the end of the barrow, with a monkey-like sense of security.

"Do you think you'll find your mother in the town?" asked she.

"I sha'n't look for her, Marm," was the reply ; "she'll find her way back to London, and we shall meet in Mann's Gardens right enough. She often gives me the slip for a week or so, and goes off to drown herself. She is fond of drowning herself, I can tell you."

"And how'll you get to London?"

"Walk and get lifts, and so on—if Mr. Tarby's afraid I shall kill his donkey."

Owen elevated his voice at this, but Tarby did not hear him, or considered it policy to be deaf to the hint.

"Do you know anyone in London, boy?" asked Mrs. Tarby, after a while.

"Only the doctor."

"Doctor who?"

"He's called the doctor—I don't know why—he wouldn't doctor me if I was ever so ill. *He buys pocket-handkerchers.*"

"I wouldn't try to find him," said Mrs. Tarby. "He'll never be of good to you. So, here's the town ; just look about for your mother."

"Oh, yes—and sure to walk to London then," said the boy, dropping lightly from the barrow. "If she wants me, she'll be looking out herself. I say, Tarby."

"Hollo !" replied Tarby, looking round sharply at this familiar address.

"*Thankee* for the ride so far—thankee, Sir."

The boy laughed shrilly, and Tarby gave a hoarse laugh in return, and cracked his whip at Owen's little legs, which were too quick for the compliment, and darted away.

Mrs. Tarby saw no signs of Owen's mother in the town, although she troubled herself more about catching a glimpse of the well-known battered straw bonnet of that lady than her son, who ran lightly beside the barrow till it drew up before the "*Markshire Arms*." Tarby spent a quarter of an hour in the "*Markshire Arms*," and finally emerged therefrom with a blue and white china mug frothing over with that ale for which Markshire has reasonable call to be proud. After Mrs. Tarby had drunk, the mug was returned to Tarby, who tilted it slowly upwards, and his head gradually backwards, till his left eye became aware of an observer. Tarby drank less fast, paused to take breath, looked fondly into the interior of the mug, and then, with a kind of wrench of his better nature, said,—

"I suppose you wouldn't watch every drop a feller drinks like that if you weren't thirsty. Here."

Owen snatched at the mug, drank off the contents, and, possibly by way of return for Tarby's kindness, ran with it into the bar. He lingered at the bar some minutes watching the evolutions of a paroquet at the back, and when he was in the street again there was no sign of Tarby's equipage. Owen set off at once in pursuit down the wet London road; it was still raining, and the deep puddles with which the road was studded were cool and refreshing to Owen's bare feet, as he ran splashing through them. The boy was light of foot—good practice, the constant pursuit of that society which ignored him and mistrusted him, and with which, young as he was, he was at war, had rendered him a swift runner; and he dashed along in pursuit, keeping his head flung back, his chest forward, and moving his legs at a pace that astonished many a Markshire rustic whom he passed on his way.

Owen soon caught sight of the donkey trap: and the owner, looking round Mrs. Tarby's umbrella, as quickly discovered Owen advancing towards him, at a pace difficult for his donkey to outstrip.

Still Tarby was a little tired of the young gentleman's society; Owen's persistence tried his temper, and he applied the whip to his donkey in consequence, and rattled down the hills and round the corners at a rate that bumped three-fourths of the breath out of Mrs. Tarby's body.

But all the perseverance in the world, accompanied with a sharp whip and blasphemous adjurations, will not excite a

donkey to feats of any great importance after the first mad impulse to prance has been surmounted ; and Owen gained upon the barrow, to the inexpressible annoyance of the proprietor.

"How well that boy runs, Tarby," commented his wife.

"He's an aggravating boy, and I don't like to be put upon."

Tarby gave the donkey an additional cut with the whip, which caused a spasmodic elevation of the hind legs, but added nothing to the rate of progression.

It became very evident that there was no running away from Owen—no tiring that youth, or rendering him too short of breath to follow. Whenever Tarby or his wife looked round, there was Owen a few yards from them, grinning from ear to ear, or waving his cap or his hand, by way of polite assent to Tarby not to put himself out of the way on his account.

He was level with the barrow at last, and holding on behind as he ran, and somewhat anxious to attract the notice of Mrs. Tarby.

"Don't hang on behind like that, young feller !" shouted Tarby. "Don't you see it's hard work for us up the hill?"

"All right, guv'nor," was the response, and Owen proceeded to run by the side, and, as the way became more steep, to take the precedence, and look behind at the equipage somewhat derisively.

On the brow of the hill he condescended to impart the information that the rain was clearing off a bit, and then that the donkey looked "blown," and Tarby inspected him with a stony gaze, and was very cutting with his monosyllables.

Tarby did not attempt to leave Owen behind again. He had many miles of ground to get over ; and, though he was a sufficient judge of donkey-flesh to know that he had purchased a first-rate animal of its class, yet he felt perfectly assured that pitting him against a young vagabond, whom nothing seemed to tire, was not a judicious experiment so early in the day.

Still, he had no idea of adding any extra weight to his barrow ; nay, more, he had begun to consider Owen's perseverance as a personal affront to himself, and one that required putting down in some way. He was not fond of boys' society at any time ; and although the boy had made him smile once or twice by his ready answers, yet that was no reason why he should carry him to London, free of all demands. The boy's officiousness annoyed him also. Once he dropped his whip in the road, and, before he could slip off the shafts, Owen had picked it up and put it in his hands ;

and once, striding along to relieve the weight, Owen had volunteered, in the coolest manner, to take the reins a bit, if Mr. Tarby liked—which he didn't.

The rain ceased when they were six or seven miles from Markshire; the blue sky struggled with the fleecy banks of cloud, and gained the mastery, and scattered them so much that the sun shone forth and sowed the hedgerows and grassy banks with diamonds. The change in the weather, or an extra pint of beer that he had slipped into a roadside inn to procure, did not improve Tarby's temper, however; and Mrs. Tarby having fallen asleep, with her head on one side, and her bonnet half down her back, Owen was left destitute of friends. He was used to that state of things; it was his normal condition. He had been born so—lived on so—everybody had been against him from his birth. He could have borne and put up with a great deal, and not considered himself aggrieved; and Tarby must have been far more churlish and unmanlike before he could have shaken off the good impression that past kindness had left on the boy. Owen was of a pushing order, and had not much bashfulness. Like a dog one may have unintentionally caressed by the roadside, he had become intrusive, and solicitous for a few more of those kind words and looks to which his life had been foreign; and even the sharp sidelong glance that he occasionally bestowed on Tarby had something of the animal instinct in it—that instinct to be friends with a master who has lately used the whip or the harsh word.

Mrs. Tarby awoke, after half-an-hour's nap, and looked about her, and nodded at Owen, who brightened up at her patronage, and gave a quick jerk of his head in return for the salutation. The morning was growing late when they entered a little town some ten or twelve miles from Markshire Downs, and drew up before another roadside inn, where some of yesterday's cattle-dealers and nondescript personages were lingering about. Tarby exchanged a few words with one or two who had fraternised with him yesterday; and Mrs. Tarby went shopping, on a small scale, at a general establishment over the way, whilst Tarby saw to the wants of his new purchase, previous to lighting a short pipe, and entering the tap-room. Owen, leaning against the post that held the creaking sign above his head, observed all this, followed with his eyes the movements of Mrs. Tarby, saw her cross the road and join her husband, with a slight feeling of disappointment, perhaps.

Surely it *was* animal instinct that kept this lad waiting for the humble pair, who had been, to a certain extent, charitable towards him, that led him to make friends with Tarby's don-

key, and pat its neck, and rub its lumpy hairy forehead with almost a younger brother's affection. There seemed even more sympathy between Owen and his asinine companion, than between Owen and his fellow-creatures. They understood each other better, and were more inclined to be friends. Both had seen the world, and experienced its hardships, and been kicked and beaten, and sworn at, treated cruelly and unjustly, in fact, from the earliest age. Both were poor and disreputable, and wore no livery to command respect.

I do not know if any similar thoughts occurred to Owen, as he leaned his little shock head against the donkey's neck; possibly he was thinking more of the bar-parlour, and what it was likely Mr. and Mrs. Tarby had for dinner. He stood there very quietly; and, as he is handy for his portrait at this juncture, perhaps the reader would like him at full length.

A boy of nine years, or thereabouts, tall for his age, with large jet-black eyes, that gave him a gipsy look, and would have added more interest to his pinched face if they had been less inclined to sharp, suspicious glances, that had no small amount of cunning in them. What the face might have been under happier auspices, it is difficult to say—possibly frank and rosy, and expressing the candour and innocence of youth; for it was only a face to shrink from at first sight, my respectable Sirs and Madams. Looked at closely, and with that interest which all God's creatures, and especially such poor strays as these, are entitled to—looked at, remembering our common origin and brotherhood—and the face was but pale, and pinched with famine and anxiety, and the brow heavy and contracted only with the knowledge that every man's hand was against its owner, and prepared to thrust him from the door. The nose was long and straight, and might turn out an aristocratic nose; and nature had had nothing to do with the thinness and whiteness of his lips. Push the cap from his forehead, and brush therefrom that villainous lock of hair which trailed into his eyes, and there were thought, and intelligence, and energy expressed.

In the boy, as he stands there, are materials to make a man of—a clever man, perhaps, whose way, properly indicated, may lead to greatness; but there are few teachers in the highways, and such boys as these are disregarded by the philosopher in the crowd. The thought, intelligence, and energy are misdirected—surrounded by things evil, they are applied to evil purpose, and the tree brings forth the fruit after its kind, as God's law indicated from the first.

Owen waited as patiently as the donkey for the Tarbys; he had no thought of pushing on and being overtaken some

not seen paint or varnish, or known a scrubbing-brush, since its first coat in ages remote.

Owen looked perplexed, and turned a shade more pale. He was uncertain, doubtful. If he had been ever taught a prayer, it might have escaped his lips then, hard and inured to the world as he was. For she had been his one friend, the only one whom he had known ; she—but perhaps Tarby was only going to shut up early ; to-morrow was Saturday—market morning—and he knew Tarby must rise at half-past four to reach Covent Garden in anything like time. Only going to shut up—to be sure. Why, here came another shutter.

And that was the last ! Owen saw him turn back into the parlour, leaving his advertisement of a death in Hannah Street to the notice of his neighbours. Was it only an impulse that took Owen up the steps and once more into the shop, where he stood against the potato-bin, and waited some one's attendance. Presently the woman put her head out, and said, "What do *you* want ?" in no very civil tones.

"I want to see Tarby."

"Can't I serve you ?"

"No," was the quick response.

Tarby reappeared in the shop after this abrupt reply, and Owen and he looked each other in the face.

"What—is that you ?" said Tarby.

"Yes, it's *me*," and then they stood looking at each other till Owen broke silence. "I see the shutters are up—I'm sorry."

Tarby did not answer, but surveyed him with a little more surprise.

"I dare say you don't think it, now ?" with a strange half-laugh.

"Well—it's funny."

"She—she—" with a gulp—"gave me the first good word, and that's more nor my own mother ever did. She promised to tell me what was wrong, if I ever thought I didn't know it from the right—and now she's dead, Tarby !"

"Not the old woman—not Polly, boy. It aren't so bad as that."

"It's—it's—"

"The babby—the little one that was only born a week ago, and, like all the rest, was tooked."

"Oh ! I'm so glad it's dead !"

"Oh ! are you ?"

"Instead of Mrs. Tarby, you know," said the boy, with

some perception of having wounded Tarby's feelings 'It wouldn't have done for *us* to have lost her."

"Well, it wouldn't have mattered to you much, that I can see."

"I don't know that," said the boy, with feverish impatience. "I can't say as much, nor more can you. I came to ask about the wrong, and she'll tell me when she's better."

"I can't make you out exactly," said Tarby, dubiously. "Where's all your impercence gone to?"

"I'm not well just now," said Owen, hurriedly, "and your shutters gived me a turn, and I haven't eaten anythink for four-and-twenty hours, and — and — when shall I call again?"

"Next week, if you like—when Polly's better. You needn't come a-bothering now, you see."

"I see," was the reply.

"She's bothered, and I'm bothered enough without you, young one. Here—hold your cap."

Owen held his cap as directed, and Tarby tilted into it the measure of parched peas, and ate half-a-dozen peas or so himself from the basin, by way of an alleviation to his grief.

"Now, cut!"

Owen "cut" as directed, and was half-way down Hannah Street, when he heard some one striding after him. Looking back he found Tarby rapidly advancing.

"Here, she must have her way now. She wants to see you."

"Does she, though?" and the boy's face brightened, and was like a new face to Tarby.

"Don't bother her too much, now," warned Tarby; "or make her cry or anythink, or I shall larrup you when you come out."

"I'll take the most possiblest care, Tarby."

"Don't talk of the babby," continued Tarby.

"Not a word."

"Cut it as short as you can, and don't drop the parched peas over the floor, cos they make a cussed row when you tread on 'em."

"I'll mind, Tarby."

Tarby and Owen entered the shop, and passed into the parlour. A low, black ceilinged room, of narrow dimensions, and distorted shape—running to sharp angles. A hot, close room, in which a fire burned brightly, and before which, on a sofa, lay Tarby's wife, pale and delicate, and looking more the lady than she did on Markshire Downs. The woman at the back, wife of the up stairs lodger, and officiating for the

time as nurse, was arranging something on two chairs at the back, which Owen guessed was the dead baby.

"Well, boy, here you are again!" said Mrs. Chickney.

"Yes, Mum, here I are again."

"You were talking of something wrong; and I thought I would not let you go away — although there's something wrong here, too — without hearing all about it. We aint no cause to forget other people's troubles in our own, Mrs. Wortley."

"No, Mrs. Chickney, no. As you were a-saying on—no cause," mumbled the old woman, without looking up from her task.

"Tarby, don't go in the shop," said his wife, detecting in him a movement to withdraw; "I had rather you sit down a bit."

"Very well;" and Tarby, obedient and lamb-like, relapsed into a half-bottomless cane chair, and looked steadily at the fire.

"Now, what's wrong?"

"This is how it is, Mum—mother has never come back. I've been to every public in the Cut and Marsh, and no one's seen or heard on her."

"Oh, dear! — and what have you been doing all the while?"

"Trying to live, Mum. It's hard lines, though."

"You're sorry for your mother, now, I suppose."

"I think so," was the evasive answer; then he added, "but she spanked hard, and I never seed a great deal of her sober—only twice, I think."

"Well?"

"Well! I tried to get to sea; and no one would have me, because they were afraid I should die half-way out, afore I come of use; and as for entering the harmy,—as you thought on—I was laughed at, Mum!"

"Short as you can," suggested Tarby, from his chair.

"And so I went to the handkercher man."

"Oh!"

"Yes, Mum; and he said he thought he could make me useful, or find me something to do in a week or two, if I called; and I've put it off, because I thought you'd like to know it, p'raps, before I went."

"Do you like this man?"

"Can't abide him, Mrs. Tarby."

"But you must live, like the rest of us, and you'd do better if you could?"

"Yes."



"You'd be honest, if you had a chance, p'raps. You'd try to know the right from wrong, and let others teach you ; and serve them well and faithfully, p'raps—why, you'd try not to be bad, wouldn't you ?"

"Yes."

"And it's as easy to go right as wrong, when you're once put in the way—isn't it, Tarby ?"

"Easy as a glove," affirmed Tarby, who had always found it one of the hardest tasks of his life.

"Then Tarby shall make you errand boy here, if you don't mind sleeping in the shop, and getting up early to market, and attending to the donkey."

"Eh ?" said the amazed Tarby.

"We shall want a boy—the business takes up all our time, Tarby, and he'll be a great help till I am strong, and don't think so much of"—here her voice faltered—"of poor baby there."

"But—"

"But you'll let me have my way, Tarby, in this? It's for the good of all of us, p'raps ; and this boy mustn't go astray. See how cheap it'll be, too—only to have a boy for his keep."

"He'll get to the till," affirmed Tarby.

"Oh ! don't think so bad of me as that," pleaded the boy, whose chest was heaving and eyes sparkling at the prospect of his rise in life ; "may I drop down dead, if I ever take a ha'penny of your money !"

"We will try him for a week, Tarby ?"

"Um !" responded her husband.

"Do you remember me saying at Markshire that he reminded me of our first baby's looks ?"

Tarby nodded assent.

"If we could only think that it was that first baby, grewed up rather fast, and taken two years for one—or only fancy that, to make up for having no babies of our own, this boy was sent for us to make some good out of. I don't know how it is that I should take to the boy, and feel that I can trust him. Perhaps because he's as motherless as I'm—I'm childless, Tarby."

"Now you're going to cry, old woman, and upset yourself," said Tarby.

"And the doctor said that we couldn't keep you too quiet, just at present," added the woman from the background.

"And here you are a-going it, like one o'clock !" clinched Tarby.

"I'm not a-going it—I'm not thinking of crying," said his

wife, hysterically. "Shall we give this boy a home now? Poor as it is, it may be a grand place for him."

"We'll try him. Young shaver," turning to Owen, "we're going to try you. Mind your manners, and behave yourself according."

Owen, who felt a choking in his throat, and a spasmodic desire to clench and unclench his hands, and tear little pieces off the ragged ends of his waistcoat and jacket, nodded his head by way of acquiescence.

"I needn't say," added Tarby, "you'll catch it, if you don't. Now, come into the shop, and leave the missis to herself."

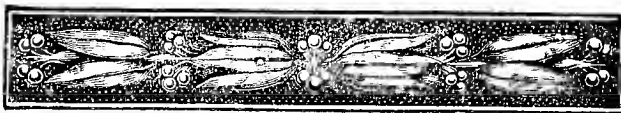
Owen hesitated. He wished to express something like thanks, but his powers of utterance were gone, and there was nothing he could think of suitable to the occasion, even had he possessed the full use of his faculties. He was in a mist ; everything was confused, and had no tangibility. To wake up on some door-step, or amongst the baskets of the Borough Market, or under one of the dry arches in the Belvidere Road, or amongst the logs which the timber merchants left on open spaces of ground before their premises, would have been the most natural termination to so strange a scene, and only by its contrast have rendered reality a shade more bitter. He could not believe yet that Tarby's house was to be his home—Tarby, the hero of Lower Marsh, whom it took six policemen to carry to the station-house ! And Tarby's wife, who was to be a new mother to him—who was to let him understand, for the first time, what a mother was like ! He thought no more of the other mother ; he would have been sorry to see her return and claim him—she had never sought to win his affections by a word.

It was a new life for Owen, from which much was to evolve—the first step backward from the easy downward path his ignorance was leading him. Say that the progress was not great, that Tarby and his wife were people of common minds and low ideas, and never went to church, or cared for church or chapel—still Owen had stepped back from the brink, and the step had brought with it reflection for the past, and a something like resolve for the future. We cannot all rise from the mire and put on angels' wings, and float upwards higher, higher from the sordid earth that claims us—if in the common business-life of that earth one falters somewhat, and meets with much to retard an earnest progress, how much more weak and trembling are the steps that lead us from the snares lying in the valley of unrighteousness !

END OF THE FIRST BOOK.

## BOOK II.

TRAGEDY IN HANNAH STREET.



## CHAPTER I.

“92.”

**T**WO years since Tarby's child was buried, and Tarby took a *protégé* in the shape of Owen into his establishment. Two years to such people as Tarby and his wife, and in such a neighbourhood, do not record great changes. The shop remained still open at the corner of Hannah Street, the same greens might be in the corner, the same potatoes in the bin, the same mugful of parched peas measured out for the next customer, as on the night when Owen was rescued from the streets.

Tarby's fortunes had neither risen nor fallen since that time. Tarby had periodical fits of saving and sobriety, for which his wife could calculate as readily as for his fits of relaxation and beer in boxing-week, and Whitsuntide, and Easter. Tarby was no more known to be inebriated on the weeks preceding those festive occasions, than in the memory of the costermongers of Lower Marsh he was known to have passed a holiday-week without “his fling,” as they termed it—which “fling” consisted in drinking deeply, and becoming quarrelsome, and fighting those who were as disputatious as himself, and winding up the week in Tower Street station-house. Tarby's idiosyncrasies were so well-known Lambeth way that, in holiday times, the police on duty in the Marsh had a habit of shutting their eyes to escapades not too glaringly outrageous, and to there's-a-good-fellowing him when they wanted him to go home, and to even turning down quiet streets if there were a fight outside the public-house and Tarby's bullet head was seen dodging up and down in the midst of the million who saw sport; but the result was equally the same, and Tarby was before a magistrate, and fined or committed three

times a year as usual. And yet Tarby made great efforts to amend, and made Polly fifty promises when sobered down, and turn to his work and his costering, like a moral Hercules, when the fit was over, and he had become a sadder, wiser, poorer man, for his experience of life.

Looking in upon Tarby's wife, now two years have swept by, we find her busying about the shop and bustling to and fro with all her energy. She was not so strong as she used to be, she informed her neighbours, and her face was more pale and lined, as if Tarby's constant "goings on" were wearing out her hopes, and scoring every one she lost upon her face. And yet she laughed as heartily as ever when there was anything to laugh at in Hannah Street—and in the midst of "poverty, hunger and dirt," poor people will find food for merriment—and had the same habit of turning the best side uppermost, which would make a pleasant dwelling-place of the earth, if the habit were catching and we could all have the complaint.

To hear her defending Tarby in holiday time, when her neighbours came in flocks to compassionate her, and were rather disappointed in their hearts if she had no black eye to present to public gaze, would have done the heart good of a Diogenes.

"Lord bless you, it's a way of his I was used to long ago. You see, what with Christmas boxes, and people standing treat, and no one working with the barrow, Tarby takes too much, and his poor head isn't strong. And then he's hasty like, and hits before he thinks of what he's doing—sorry enough after he'll be, if he's hurt anybody!"

And Mrs. Tarby would proceed with a cheerful step into the back parlour, and trim the candle, and bring forth a whole basketful of needlework to amuse her, while sitting up for the Tarby whose "poor head" was at that time, perhaps, being rapped about by policemen's staves, and found thick enough to bear that operation without cracking much.

They had been fortunate and unfortunate in business during the past two years, but of late Tarby had worked extra hard, and "brought the place round again a bit," as he termed it; and the donkey remained in the back shed, and they were not more behind with the rent than usual. There was a chance of Tarby's wife presenting to the world another feeble specimen of the Chickney race by that time, and Tarby's wife had many thoughts to make her anxious, keep her weak.

Owen had grown some inches in the two years, and was looking better and more creditable. He had lost a good

deal of his pallor, and all that pinched expression which famine had scored on his face, and his eyes only retained something of that shrewdness and rapid manner of passing from object to object to which we have alluded in an early portion of this history.

The reader may have anticipated that he has kept honest and faithful to the Chickneys ; the boy had only required an incentive to turn from the wrong, a goal to work forward to, a hope to be held out, a seed to be planted, to proceed a better, purer way than that which circumstances had seemed to indicate. They would be cruel statistics, and full of mystery, and of a fearful interest, if we could have our tabular accounts of those who might have turned like Owen in their younger days, had the one friend stepped forth, or the one loophole to escape been left unguarded. Who will answer for those accounts when the day comes?—shall you and I, dear brother, have our shares allotted, and have claims to pay for that wilful blindness, lukewarmness, plea of overwork and over study, that have kept us from the poor and sinful, to whom our guidance might have been salvation? There may come a dreadful reckoning, without friends or loopholes for ourselves ; and the measure we have used will mete out God's charity to us—we have been warned, and yet we take no lesson.

It is true that Owen might have been in better hands ; but it was an honest life he was pursuing, and Mrs. Chickney was full of homely sayings, that more often left a moral than even Owen was aware. Owen was of great use to Tarby now—could wheel a barrow at eleven years of age, and conduct business in the Marsh, even of a Saturday night ; and had the quickest eye for a bad halfpenny of all the youths in Lambeth. Tarby, who was not a man of fancies, and was difficult to please, had taken to the boy after a while, and been pleased with his unwearying exertions for the Tarby cause in general. No distance was too great, no load too heavy, no hour too late or early for him in the Chickney service ; and Tarby, though not a good temper himself, could admire an exhibition thereof in his errand boy.

"Can I do anything for *you* now?" Tarby had said one day, in the warmth of his heart, when Owen had been over-earnest in his duties.

"Yes—teach me to fight, Tarby !" was the ready response ; and Tarby went down on his knees in the shop, and gave Owen his first lesson, as a reward of merit for services of distinction.

If Owen's mother had made her appearance at any time

during the course of those two years, she would have scarcely found her son recognisable, he was shooting up so fast, and there was not a rag to swear to his identity. Tarby's wife was a tidy woman, and handy with her needle, and wished Owen to be a credit to the establishment ; and Owen was worth the trouble and the expense, and the stray penny or two with which he was remunerated at times. Owen could take another basket, or barrow, and sell on account in another part of the Lower Marsh, and bring home the profits correct to a fraction. It was possibly the extra exertion of Owen that had kept the little shop in Hannah Street in about the same position, despite the wear and tear of profit which Tarby's uncertain actions incurred. Two years, then, to the very day, of the month of Owen's adoption—a Saturday night, and Lambeth life busy and feverish. The snow of two years since might be the same white garment covering the dirt and dust of the roadway, the scene in Hannah Street had changed so little. There was more action in the scene, however ; and the tide of men, women and children, flowing to the cheapest market, streamed on unceasingly. The Lower Marsh was deafening with a thousand voices, calling attention to as many varied wares, and the roar thereof sounded like a distant angry sea in Hannah Street. There was everything to sell and buy in the busy thoroughfare ; and traders in human weakness were even at their old game of selling penny sovereigns, and sealed packets that could only be presented with halfpenny straws, a trick which has gone on for thirty years and more, and is still found profitable, even in streets where the shadow of privation lurks eternally.

Mrs. Chickney was driving a good trade in Hannah Street, despite prices being higher than usual at that season of the year. There had not been sufficient capital in hand to stock Owen's barrow as well as Tarby's that particular evening, and Owen was at home with Tarby's wife, assisting in the general business, and taking things home when required by prudent folk who were going farther, and perhaps had a Sunday joint, and six loaves, and a baby to carry back.

"That parcel of greens and potatoes has been waiting a couple of hours, Owen," cried Mrs. Chickney in dismay, when a lull in the trade afforded an opportunity of discovering the omission. "Oh ! dear, and new customers, too — what'll they say?"

"I'll manage to make it all square, mother," replied Owen.

Owen had begun, of late years, to call Mrs. Tarby "mother." It was a natural word, and there was a pleasure in the sound to the hard-working woman, who had never been a mother

for many days at a time. And she had been a true mother to this waif of ours, and he was grateful.

"It's No. 6, in Jenkin's Street, and the name's Dell."

"I sha'n't forget it."

"And don't leave anything without the money—we can't trust people till we know a little more about them."

"All right."

And Owen, passing his arm through his basket-handle, proceeded on his way whistling the last melody that the street songsters had made popular in Lambeth. No 6 in Jenkin's Street was soon reached—a street a little more wide and clean than that of Hannah Street in dirty weather, and where more of the neighbours had taken the trouble to sweep the snow from their doors, and polish their door handles, and give an additional brilliancy to their little dabs of knockers.

Owen knocked and gave a peculiar yell, which Tarby had taught him, as of a canine animal in the direst agony, and which was symbolical of "greens," and presently the door opened and a pretty-faced girl of ten years old stood waiting to receive the goods.

"Oh ! is it you at last ?" said she ; "how late you are !"

"Mrs. Chickney's wery sorry, and forgot all about 'em till this minute—hopes you haven't been put out at all or had to sit up—one shilling and three halfpence, please."

"Tell that boy to come inside," shouted a voice from the parlour, the door of which was open, and through which the fumes of tobacco-smoke were stealing forth into the passage.

"You're to come inside, please."

"Well, don't catch hold of the basket, then—I'll carry it," said Owen, who had his suspicions of a credit account being suggested by the head of the family, and had an objection to urge to the contrary.

Owen entered the room without any reluctance, and, having forgotten to remove his cap, gave from under the peak one of his sharpest and most comprehensive glances. He nearly dropped the basket in his consternation at the first object of his attention—a big, burly man, all whiskers, in a blue uniform and white buttons, and having the figures 92 neatly worked on his collar, and an enormous iron-topped hat resting at his feet, between two enormous boots to match the hat. Government turns out things on a large scale, and is more improvident than sparing with material.

If there were any consolation to Owen, it was in the knowledge presented by the garterless left wrist that 92 was off duty, and had his stock unfastened, which gave him a less



fierce and red aspect, and did not keep all the blood in his head with undue pressure. He had evidently retired from public action for that particular evening ; and the pipe in his mouth, and the glass of gin and water at his elbow, gave a happy and novel turn to his general appearance.

But 92 was only a guest at No. 6 in Jenkin's Street, and for the first time in Owen's experience was playing a subordinate part, and shoving nobody, and moving nobody on ! Why, he looked quite happy and peaceable, and Owen would have liked Tarby to have seen him just for half a minute—he would have scarcely believed his eyes. To think of 92 smoking a long clay-pipe—it was enough to make Owen dream of it, and have the nightmare, under the little counter where he slept.

Although occupied in particular with No. 92, Owen had taken stock of the second inmate, also smoking a long clay pipe, and having a second glass of gin and water at his elbow to match that of his official friend's. He was a man of smaller proportions, in a suit of clothes that had once been white, but was now covered with iron-mould and dabbled with soot, and marked with extra shades of blackness at the knees and elbows. A man above the middle height, but squarely built, and with a family likeness to 92 in the countenance, which was, however, of a less lumpish description, and boasted two great gray eyes, that looked through Owen, and made him feel uncomfortable, and as if he had stolen something.

"Put that basket down, lad, and come here," said the man in fustian.

"All right, Sir," said Owen, giving vent to his usual remark, and retaining a firm hold of his basket as he advanced, "it's one and three-halfpence, if you please."

"Don't you think I'll pay you?" asked the man.

"Aint afeard of that, Sir," was Owen's doubtfully-moral reply.

"If I don't, lad, give me in charge——" and he pointed with the stem of his pipe to policeman 92.

"Off duty, John—off duty."

And John and 92 laughed heartily, and nodded at each other in a pleasant here's-your-good-health style, before they dipped their noses simultaneously into their glasses of grog.

"These things were ordered long ago," said the man addressed as John ; "and I like punctuality—it's a good thing, and you can't have too much of it. If I support your mother's establishment, I must have all promises kept to the letter. Tell her, will you?"

"All right, Sir."

"But it's all wrong, Sir, if you come creeping in three hours after time. Time's money; and I'm always true to the minute myself. If you had ever heard of John Dell, boy, you'd have known that by this time."

"Time's money—and I'm wasting it," said Owen.

"Eh?—what?—wasting it in listening to profitable advice?"

"You see I'm wanted," said Owen, apologetically; "and it's—it's a long time to wait for one and three-halfpence."

Dell could not forbear laughing at this, and striking his hand smartly on his knee.

"An eye to business after all," said he; "this lad's not slow, Bob?"

"No, no," was the hesitant answer; and 92 bit his pipe hard, and shut one eye and looked attentively at Owen with the other. Owen felt he was known, and coloured up to the roots of his hair.

"So it comes to one and three-halfpence," said the master of the house. "Where's your bill, boy?"

"Haven't brought none."

"Brought *none*!—who said you had brought *none*?" said Mr. Dell, taking up his grammar. "Bob" (turning to 92), "your pencil a moment."

Bob drew a lead pencil from his pocket and presented it to Mr. Dell, who commenced writing on a scrap of paper.

"Always methodical, you see, Bob," (he commented as he wrote). "I like things square still, and keep things in order to the best of my ability. '*To greens, etc., one and three-half pence*'—here, put paid to that."

And paper and pencil were pushed towards our hero, who reddened again and stupidly regarded the document.

"We never give bills," said Owen, after a pause.

But the gentleman addressed was picking out one and three-halfpence from a handful of coppers and small silver he had drawn from his trousers-pocket, and heeded not the remark. The exact sum having been laid by the side of the paper, Dell said, in half soliloquy:

"I haven't had time to sort all those four-penny-pieces yet. I like my money, when I have any, in proper compartments, Bob. A pocket for small-change, another for half-crowns and shillings; a special pocket that I have made thief-proof for the few half-sovereigns and sovereigns that so seldom turn up—now, boy, look alive and put 'Paid.'"

"I can't write," Owen confessed, slowly, and almost sullenly.

"Can't write!" exclaimed the other; "that's hard—that's wrong."

He sat with one large veined hand pressed on the table near the paper, and looked at Owen steadily. There was something open as the day in the man's face, and Owen took to it, although its looks abashed him.

"How's that?"

"I haven't had a chance—no one's thought of it. I'm busy all day."

"You should go to evening school like me, little boy," said a voice close to his side.

Owen looked at the pretty-faced girl who had first opened the door to him. Her soft voice, after the sharp ringing tones of John Dell, was a pleasant relief, and it was hard to answer all John Dell's questions.

"I haven't the time, Miss."

"Then you must make time, boy!" cried Dell in a passion. "It won't do to be a dunce in these days. It will be worse when you're a man, and have a living to earn. You must push about, and learn by any means, at any time, in any fashion. What's your mother and father about all this time?"

"Father I never had, and mother run away from me," said Owen.

"Ay, ay—that's it."

"You're with Tarby?" said 92, addressing Owen for the first time.

"Yes."

"Who's Tarby?" enquired Dell, catching up the words, and following on in a characteristic brusque manner.

"A costermonger—a——"

"Know anything against him?"

"N'no," replied 92, puffing more vigorously at his pipe.

"Off duty, Bob?" said Dell.

"Ay, ay, John—off duty."

And both men laughed again.

Owen here suddenly broke in with—

"There's nothing much to be said agin him, off duty or on. He's quick at times, nothin' more. 92 can't say a word more agin him than that."

"Quick and hot," said 92—"not much more."

"No," and Owen looked as if he thought he might have said a little less.

"And they won't give you time, morning or night, to go to school? They had better give you time to hang yourself than run you quite so close," said Dell.

Owen relinquished his basket to Ruth, and bent over his money, and went through a calculation of his own to make sure that it was quite correct. He had nothing to say to Mr. Dell's last remark. It was uncalled for, if unanswerable. Mr. Dell was taking up his time too, and it was Saturday night.

"Make your mark or something, boy, and that gentleman will witness it," said Dell. "I like things ship-shape, and proofs of payment evident."

Owen made a cross, and 92 affixed his signature thereto, as witness to the legal payment in full of all demands of one shilling and three-halfpence to Mr. Chickney, or Mr. Chickney's representative.

"That'll do, boy," said Mr. Dell. "Here, Ruth, put this on the file, and show the dunce out."

"You're hard upon me," said Owen, with a flash of spirit, and the black eyes regarding Mr. Dell in a manner far from loving.

"You're hard upon yourself, and Tarby's harder. Don't put the blame on me. Good-night."

"Good-night," Owen felt called upon to respond.

"You don't look quite a fool, and you're losing all your chances by growing up to be one," he continued, with no small warmth. "Your —, what? Going, Bob?"

"Yes, I must be off, John, now," replied 92, rising. "Glad am I to have found you well and hearty, and as full of steam as ever."

"You would not have me at a lower pressure?"

"No, no. It looks well."

"It wouldn't do to be even too slow in your line, eh?"

"Not exactly," said he, putting on his hat. "Well, good-night to you, John. I hope you'll like your place."

"I make up my mind to like a thing I turn to. It's more comfortable."

"Ay, that's true."

"It's philosophical, Bob."

"Ay, it's philosophical," said 92, after a little struggle with the word, ending with bringing it out wrong, as people who struggle with a fine word generally do—a phonic retribution for meddling with things they are not well acquainted with.

Meanwhile Ruth Dell had shown Owen into the passage.

"Do you mind waiting a minute more?" she asked.

Owen, who was anxious to leave the house wherein he had experienced no small amount of torture, hesitated; but, before he could reply, Ruth had darted up a flight of stairs in the dark, and was down again ere he had done fumbling with the lock in his eagerness to be gone.

"There's my first spelling-book—I went through it years ago, and shall never want it again. Will you take it home and look at it, please?—I want you so very much to take it home."

Owen took it from her hands and thrust it in the pocket of his jacket, and felt more bewildered than ever beneath all this attention. He was far too confused to thank her before she shut him out in the street, or to repeat the good-night which accompanied the gift. He did not see his way very clearly before him; he had gone a step out of his old track into a new world, and the new world had dazed him. That 92 must have put him out and taken away the use of his tongue; who'd have thought of seeing him!—his evil genius; the man who never let anybody alone, or winked at anything!

The man who never let anybody alone put his hand on Owen's shoulder, as Owen trudged on with his basket. Owen gave a jump; it was so like the old times, and being "collared," and walked off to Tower Street station-house.

"You've been two years at this fun, haven't you, Owen Owen?" he asked.

It was the name they had written more than once on the charge-sheet at Tower Street, after finding Owen so completely in the dark respecting his surname. And 92 had had his eye upon him all that period, it seemed, too.

"Yes—two years."

"Well, it's a lift; and you've been pretty quiet, and gone round the corner when told, and not been sarcy, and kept your hands from picking and stealing. I'm glad to see the improvement, Owen Owen."

Was this 92 who spoke so friendly, and whose voice was so less harsh? What a difference off duty appeared to make in a man!

"You didn't—you didn't tell *them* that I had been ever locked up?" asked Owen, anxiously.

"My perfession tells me to keep my tongue quiet. If I was always telling tales off duty of what happened on, I should never feel easy in my mind, and comfortable, and unbuttoned."

"You'll never lock me up again," said Owen, cheerfully, and with a toss of the head that expressed his sure conviction.

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's a nasty part of my occupation, and I'm glad to hear it—it's so seldom chaps like you turns over a new leaf."

"We haven't all people to take care of us, or we might grow good, like Mr. Dell's little girl."

"How do you know she's good?" asked 92, in some amazement.

"She looks it—I can see it in her face—it's like a face I once saw in a picter-book."

"Ah! it's a nice, comfor'ble face," said 92, "God bless it; it's something like a face—the picture of her mother, who went off early."

"She's not like her father much," observed Owen.

"Isn't she?"

"She hasn't got such popping-out eyes."

"I'm her father," observed 92.

"Oh, I didn't mean you."

"No, but the compare-ison will fit," said he; "they're family eyes: and mine's a trifle worse than my brother's, owing to the stock. It's been noticed before."

"She has lent me a spelling-book," said Owen, anxious to change the subject, as 92 continued to favour him with his company.

"She's the best of girls—I'm vain enough to think the very best, at times."

"What's she——"

Owen paused. He felt his curiosity was mastering his politeness.

"Go on, boy."

"What's she living with Mr. Dell for, I was going to say?"

"To keep his house for him, and look after him, and have a proper home of her own. John wished it, and I was a widower, and moved about here and there and everywhere, and away all day, or all night, and she without a friend; and so she went to John's."

"I see."

"It was not proper to bring her up in a back-room, or in an empty house, which I might live in scot-free till the next tenant came; and John, so capital a manager in everything, and earning a good bit of money, and wanting a little house-keeper so much, being an old bachelor—it wasn't proper, and I saw it."

Owen, overwhelmed by 92's communicativeness, could merely nod his head in assent, and wonder if the man were always like this off duty, or whether Mr. Dell's gin and water had rendered him loquacious. It was agreeable gossip though; and Owen was interested in the Dells.

"I shall see him very often, now he's come to London; he and Ruth dropped into Lambeth, too, which has been my beat for many years. Why, I can be always looking in and seeing him and her."

"It'll be more comfortable."

"Much more comfor'ble, as you say, boy," said he; "and it'll be growing young again, and less stout, and if the superintendent don't change my quarters, why, it'll be pleasant for the three of us, and John will make his fortune under my own eye."

"When is he going to begin to make that?"

"Oh! he's working up; he gets a better place each time; everybody takes to John, and sees John's sense. In the country he went higher and higher; and now, in London, he begins where he left off, and begins in Cherbury's factory, too, at fifty-five shillings a-week—a pot of money!"

"Fifty-five—eh!" and Owen whistled long and plaintively; and as he trudged on with his basket, thought what a sum of money it was, and wondered if he should ever earn half as much. Heigho! to hear of these great incomes makes us all a little envious.

"And he was a ragged chap like you used to be, even."

"Like me!" cried Owen.

"Well, he kept his hands to himself a little more," said 92, with a reserve; "but he was like you—poor and ragged; both of us two poor and ragged little country urchins."

"And he got on, didn't he?—and everybody wasn't agin him?"

"To be sure not."

"I'll learn to read and write; I'll go to school: I'll have a try at something!" cried Owen, with excitement; "why shouldn't I?"

"Ah; why shouldn't you?"

92 paused. They were close on Hannah Street.

"Young fellow," said 92, when Owen had paused also; "don't forget that this little talk has occurred in leisure moments—moments of unbuttonment, as I may say—and don't take liberties, or grow familiar, when I am on duty in the Marsh. I'm 92 then, and duty's duty."

And after this oratorical display, 92, with his head very erect, marched down an opposite street. Owen looked after him, and wished it were always a life of unbuttonment with the big policeman—it made him so much more like a friend and brother, and left it hard to reconcile his identity with the official, who was so severe on minor delinquencies, and would have everybody moving on. As Owen watched him "moving on" down the street, he could fancy there was a tremulous sway about the lower extremities that reminded him of Tarby early on Boxing-day, before he had drunk himself into a bad temper; and he fancied John Dell of Jenkins Street, had mixed the gin and water rather stiffish, or kept

the glass filled with a too liberal hand. He fancied so; but then he was in a reflective mood, and inclined to fancy many things that night. He had been humiliated, too, and laughed to scorn by John Dell, and called a dunce. This John Dell, who had no thought for his own past estate, but swollen to greatness with his fifty-five shillings, taunted poor lads like him with their ignorance of letters. He'd learn—he would learn; there shouldn't be any more crosses on the bills he might have to receipt six months from that date. Nor six days, for that matter, for he'd find out which was a P and an A and an I and a D, and practise at "them four jockeys," till he knocked them off like copper-plate.

He was absent in mind the rest of that night, and required calling to order more than once by Mrs. Chickney, who "dratted" the boy, and couldn't understand what ailed him. When the shutters were closed, and Tarby had returned with a pile of half-pence on his barrow, Owen, over a humble supper, suddenly burst forth with—

"I shall go to school."

"Bless the boy!" cried Tarby's wife, with a jump in her chair, "what ails him?"

"I'm not wanted in the evenings, except Saturday; and there's a free school in Charlotte Street, and I'll go."

"Who's been putting those silly notions into your head?" asked Tarby.

"There's no getting on if you can't read and write, I see that, and I mean to try at both, Tarby."

"Don't be rash, Owey. Haven't I got on well enough without sich nonsense?"

"If I learn to read and write when I'm not wanted," said Owen, without heeding Tarby's last remark, "why shouldn't I? Everybody aint going to beat me, Tarby."

"I wonder I didn't think of it before," remarked Mrs. Chickney.

"You don't blame me, mother?"

"Who—I? Why should I, my lad, be sorry to see you trying to do well? Learn all you can, and shame the devil, that nearly got hold of you."

Owen found time to look at the spelling-book before he went to bed. It was an old volume, with long s's, badly printed, and on indifferent paper, but still in excellent preservation. If Owen could have read, he would have seen on the fly-leaf the autograph of John Dell, and a date of thirty-two years back; and beneath that, in a clearer and even in a beautiful handwriting, "Ruth Dell, her book."

But all was undecipherable to the neophyte standing at the



door of the temple, and about to make his first step. He could only turn over the leaves and gaze at the rude woodcuts and pass the book round for inspection to Tarby's wife, and for cool contemptuous disparagement on the part of Tarby.

"And who do you think I saw at our new customer's, Tarby?" said Owen, when the book was returned to him. "You'll never guess."

"Your mother."

"No, no," cried Owen—"not she."

"It was some one as set you silly, anyhow," said Tarby.

"It was 92."

"Good Lord!"

"Off duty, and unbuttoned, and smoking a pipe, Tarby. He came nearly home with me, talking about his brother and his little girl."

"Nonsense!"

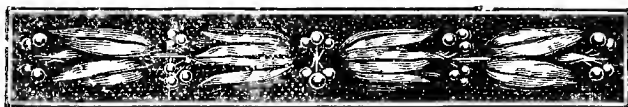
"He did, I tell you. He isn't half such a bad fellow as we thought."

"Isn't he? Well, I dare say not. I wish I hadn't hit him quite so hard last Easter, then!"

And that was Tarby Chickney's tribute to the merits of 92. He could acknowledge virtues even in his bitterest enemy.

Owen turned into his bed, composed of sacks and straw and shaving, with one blanket that had seen better days for covering, and lay awake half the night, bewildering himself with dreamy speculation as to what was to become of him when the world went round a little more, and brought him greater strength and a beard upon his chin. Should he ever read and write, and earn his fifty-five shillings a week—and repay Tarby's wife for all past kindness? Should he ever be higher than he was?





## CHAPTER II.

### A STEP FORWARDS.

**B**EFORE eleven the next morning, when Tarby was still asleep, and his wife was beginning to toast a herring for his breakfast, there came visitors to Hannah Street. Owen had been up and inspecting his lesson-book some hours, and was then practising at a large capital A with the point of a skewer on the counter, when the door was shaken, not lightly, from without. Responding to the summons, Owen was very much surprised to find on the door-step John Dell and his niece.

John Dell and his niece strangely metamorphosed; the uncle in a blue dress-coat and waistcoat, and trousers of a snowy whiteness, with boots that shone in the sun like varnished leather, and a bran new hat on. John Dell, with his grayish whiskers brushed and oiled, and his eyes a trifle more protuberant, with all the excitement of this "getting up." His niece, too, had exchanged her dark Saturday-frock for a bright claret-coloured French merino, which looked more seasonable that rapidly-thawing morning than the white ducks of her uncle, and her face looked prettier than ever under her straw hat and dark green ribbons.

"Look here, young fellow," cried Dell, in his old impetuous manner, directly the door was opened, "I want that book you took away last night."

"Took away!"—and Owen's face flushed and his hands clenched. He had learned the sin and shame of taking away his neighbour's goods.

"That Ruth here lent you and you took away. Where is it?"

Owen went back to the counter and returned with the book — the eyes of Mr. Dell taking note thereof.

"Thankee," said Dell, putting it into the tail-pocket of his dress-coat ; "it was a mistake of Ruth's, and she did not know I set some store by it—that some day it will be on a crimson cushion and under a glass shade. It taught me my letters, and then Ruth's—and there's luck in it, and I prize it. You understand now ?"

Owen nodded. His heart was a trifle too full for any reply just then ; and the rough words of John Dell, allied to a very rapid utterance, grated a little even on him, who had been used to rough words all his life.

"Uncle will buy you another," said Ruth—"one that you can read better ; but he is very careful of this, and I had forgotten it was not mine to give away. You are not angry with me ?" she asked, as Owen continued silent.

"No."

"You shall have another, if you call to-morrow," said Dell. Owen nodded again.

"You mean to come ?"

"Yes."

Dell and his niece descended the step. On the pavement he said :—

"I'm not quite used to the neighbourhood yet. The second turning will lead straight to Waterloo Road, I suppose ?"

"Yes."

"We shall be late for church, Ruth ?"

And uncle and niece walked off.

Owen stood watching them, saw the little girl look behind her, pause, and then say something to her uncle, whose face assumed a laughing expression as he paused also. A moment afterwards, and she came running back to Owen.

"I'm so sorry you're disappointed, little boy !"

Owen was a head and shoulders taller than she ; but he did not consider it a fitting opportunity to call attention to that fact, although he had before objected to the appellative bestowed upon him.

"Oh, don't mind me, Miss."

"It's only because uncle thinks a great deal of the book that he has taken it away. You'll call to-morrow evening ?"

"I said I would."

After a pause she said, suddenly,

"Don't you ever go to church ?"

"I go to see the funerals sometimes of an afternoon."

"But inside a church ?"

"Oh, no !"

"Don't you want to go to church ?"

"Can't say as I do."

“ Oh, dear !—you are a funny boy ! ”

And with a look of bewilderment at Owen, she went backwards down the step, and then ran after her uncle, whose swallow-tailed coat and white ducks were a long way down the street.

Owen leaned against the door-frame, and watched them out of sight ; remained there several minutes after they had turned the corner, thinking of the incident that had suddenly despoiled him of his prize, and of the last verdict of Ruth Dell, that he was a funny boy because he didn't go to church. He did not see any great amount of fun in it himself ; he had not thought about it before—Tarby had never gone, neither had Mrs. Tarby. Once or twice he had seen the people issue forth at one o'clock, and noticed how finely they were dressed—especially the beadle, who generally sunned himself at the great gates during the exodus. He had even thought he should like to be a beadle some day, and wear a coat with gold lace, until 92 had spoken of fifty-five shillings a week to be earned by honest folk who were clever and industrious ; and he doubted if the beadle got that, with all his finery. He had a vague idea that there was praying at church for something or other, and that everybody was shut in a little box, and told to be quiet by the pew-opener, and that the beadle was there to hit people who couldn't behave themselves. People who were christened or buried went to church he believed, but he had never gone through either ceremony ; and besides, his clothes weren't good enough. He knew that beadle would hoist him down the steps if he went up them ; and serve him right, to think of such a thing. Only one person in Hannah Street went to church, and that was a hump-backed woman at the other end of the street ; and perhaps they let her in because she *was* hump-backed, and it made all the difference as to right of entry.

Owen went to St. James's Park in the afternoon with Tarby—Tarby's wife was not quite strong enough to take such long walks just at present—and almost forgot about the Dells in his admiration of the ducks, which had taken advantage of a warm winter's day to show themselves again. But Tarby's company, in which Owen had delighted so much, was somewhat wearisome that afternoon, till Tarby met a friend, who kept him stationary three-quarters of an hour, and talked of nothing but pigeons and terrier pups all that time—affording Owen an opportunity for reverie meanwhile.

Owen was glad when Sunday was over, and the shutters were down again in Hannah Street ; there were so many hours less between him and his desire to learn. Owen knew

there was a free evening school opened in the neighbourhood, thanks to the worthy exertions of a few influential parishioners—a pioneer to the Ragged Schools that, a few years later, threw open their doors to the poor and ignorant who required instruction—and Owen proceeded thither in the evening, after calling at John Dell's by the way, and receiving a new spelling-book in exchange for the volume returned yesterday.

"I wish to learn," said Owen, entering the school boldly, and marching up to a desk at the end of the room, where a gray-haired, middle-aged man was standing.

"You are welcome."

And thus was made the second step in Owen's career upwards; and Owen, who was earnest, and not naturally dull, soon went ahead of most of his contemporaries, and made a progress satisfactory to his teacher. In the early part of Owen's novitiate there was not a large number of pupils, and the teacher could pay more attention, take more interest in the single scholar anxious to advance. The school was an experiment at that time, launched amidst a hundred obstacles and as many doleful prophecies; and the poor even turned from education gratis, and had their suspicions of a trap set somewhere.

Owen was never without his lesson-book—it was a new life to him, and each smile of his tutor was a reward for his labour. With his barrow in the streets, in his early walks to market, over a slackness of trade in the articles he hawked about, he studied his lessons; and at his age a boy will learn readily, or never. He did not think much of fifty-five shillings a week then as the goal to be arrived at some fair day, when his hopes were brightening; he saw the reward to follow his mastery of lesson-books, and felt content with the new world that opened for him gradually.

It was a proud day to call on John Dell, who was so particular concerning money matters, and sign his name, Owen Owen, in full, and see little Ruth watch his pen, and hear John Dell's hearty "That's well!" as he completed his task, and even finished off with a flourish.

"Why, you'll be a great man, Owen, if you go on so fast as this," he added.

"I shall thank you for it, Mr. Dell."

"No!—will you?"

And John Dell brought his hand smartly on his thigh again, after a habit of his when particularly exhilarated.

A turn was given to Owen's thoughts and a little check to Owen's learning by the sudden news that Mrs. Chickney was

taken ill, and required the immediate attendance of the doctor. The news was communicated to Owen by Tarby, who had run all the way to the free-school to impart the information and render Owen useful.

"Run to the parish doctor, Owen, and fetch some one as quick as you can. Tell 'em it's Mrs. Chickney—they've got her name down in the books. Run like a devil, Owen—there's a good boy!"

Owen broke from school and tore off at his utmost speed, his heart beating with the fear that there was danger to the woman who had been so good a mother to him. The parish doctor of that day lived in the Kennington Road, and many minutes had not elapsed before Owen was tugging at the bell with all the impetuosity of one in a desperate fright.

The summons being responded to, a fair young man with a fresh colour, a high forehead, and a mass of wavy hair, appeared in the doorway.

"What are you kicking up this row for? Whom do you want, boy?"

"The doctor. Mrs. Chickney wants him directly."

"Mr. Waggles is out. Who is it, do you say?"

"Mrs. Chickney, Hannah Street—Tarby's wife."

"Can't you say 'Sir'?"

"Yes, if I like."

"Say it, then, if you want attending to."

Owen objected to this young gentleman's imperious manner, and might in a case of less emergency have exhibited some freedom of opinion on the matter; but Tarby's wife was ill, and he would have gone down on his knees to the gentleman with the light hair, if he had required it at that moment. He was even polite—remembering his schooling.

"I beg your pardon. Sir—it is, Sir."

"Come in."

Leaving Owen to shut the door, the young man walked into the surgery and lumped down on a little counter a volume, which he proceeded to unclasp and open.

"What name did you say—Chickweed?"

"Chickney, Sir, of Hannah Street. She's very ill, Sir," he added, seeing that the young man acted with great deliberation.

The announcement did not appear to startle the assistant in the least degree; people very ill was a fact nothing new to announce at a parish doctor's.

"Chackster—Chub—Chaffinch—Chucksley—Chickney," said he, with a yawn, as his finger halted half-way down the column—"here we have it. I'll be with you in a moment."

"Thank, you, Sir. She's very ill!"

The assistant dawdled out of the surgery, and was absent about a quarter of an hour, during which time Owen paced up and down, and ground his teeth, and, we fear, enunciated all the oaths he had nearly forgotten with his better teaching, and felt what a relief to his mind it would be to smash every bottle in the place. When the assistant reappeared, carefully brushing a black overcoat, Owen breathed a little freer, till the man looked for something in a drawer, then in another, and another, and finally gave up the search and struggled into his great-coat, and took a hat down from behind the surgery door.

"You need not have waited for me," he said, tartly. "I know the way."

"Oh, I wasn't sure, Sir."

"And you needn't hang about me now, but run home and tell them I'm coming."

"Certainly, Sir. You'll make haste now, I hope, Sir? She's really ill."

The assistant smiled contemptuously at this, and proceeded to draw on a pair of lavender kid gloves, the admirable fit of which we will leave him admiring, and follow Owen to Hannah Street.

Owen found the little shop where he had left it—which in his bewilderment he had hardly expected—and Tarby and the old woman, who had officiated as nurse two years ago, passing in and out of the parlour.

"Where's the doctor?" cried Tarby, catching sight of Owen.

"He'll be here in a minute—that is, his assistant chap will—a fellow with such a head of hair. How's mother?"

"Pretty well, considerin'."

"I think I'll run a little way back, and see if he's coming."

"Why, you're hardly in the shop yet."

"No; but the fellow's such a time—aint he?"

"I suppose it's young Glindon; *he* always did take things easy," said Tarby, who was trying to appear cool and collected himself. "There's no occasion to flurry yourself, and—damme, if he don't make haste, I'll catch him up and carry him!"

Tarby had just obtained a glimpse of Mr. Glindon coming round the corner, at the easiest rate imaginable, and his temper was a little soured at the prospect. But he did not carry his threat into execution, and Mr. Glindon, at his own pace, turned into the little greengrocer's, and proceeded to

business forthwith, after shutting Tarby and Owen in the shop.

Tarby was as nervous as Owen after the doctor's assistant had left them. He fidgeted with the potatoes—he knocked over the parched peas—he scratched his head with a vehemence that must have hurt him—he took a run of a hundred yards down Hannah Street, for no earthly purpose that was conceivable.

"I wonder what would happen to the old shed, and you and me, if she was tooked, Owey?"

"Oh! don't talk like that!"

"She hasn't been herself lately—quite."

"Don't you think so?"

"P'raps it's only fancy, though. We won't talk of anything so horrid."

It must have been an age before the doctor came out of the parlour, and the crying of a child was heard within, and Owen and Tarby looked into his face for their answer.

"As well as can be expected, perhaps," he said. "I'll look in again in about an hour."

"Thankee," said Tarby. "And the babby—is it a boy?"

"No—a girl."

"I suppose it—it won't live now?"

"Live!" echoed the young man, "why shouldn't it?"

"Well, they haven't tooked to living at present here. It disagrees with 'em."

"This is a fine hearty infant!" and the assistant said it emphatically, as if he wished it to be taken as evidence if Tarby should poison the child in the night.

"Lord! Is it, though?"

Mr. Glendon was going down the steps when Tarby called out—

"And the Missis?"

"Keep her quiet. She'll do—*with great care.*"





## CHAPTER III.

### REFORM AND RELAPSE.

**F**OR the first time in the history of the present race of Chickneys, a baby was born that crowed, and kicked, and waxed fat — with which everything agreed, that took everything that was presented to it, and went never back in its appetite. The baby was the admiration of Hannah Street, and the female inhabitants thereof called to see it in little parties of four and five, and were loud in their praises and congratulations.

Baby, in its early stage, only took kindly to Tarby, which was an awkward dilemma, and confused that gentleman's arrangements, as Boxing-day happened before Mrs. Chickney was fairly up again, and three-fourths of his friends and acquaintances expected his company at the "Compasses." But the baby had taken a fancy to a particular and novel kind of rock on the part of Tarby, and would not be put out of his arms after he had once introduced it to its notice, save and except for nourishment purposes, or when utterly off its guard.

And Tarby, rather proud of the patronage conferred upon him, rocked and went through a husky kind of chant, and was persuaded or flattered into staying at home all Christmas week, and making himself useful. And Mrs. Chickney, who had struggled to her feet again with no small difficulty, was pleased to see Tarby at home, relieving her from the weight and worry of a heavy baby with a loud voice; and Tarby wandering about the shop with the infant was a novel sight to witness.

We say that Mrs. Chickney had struggled to her feet ; but it had been a hard struggle, as Mr. Glindon had foreseen, and when she appeared in the shop before her strength allowed—for poor people have no time to nurse themselves and “play the lady,” as they term it—she was ever from that time a faint shadow of the Polly Owen had seen first on Markshire Downs.

Tarby's wife and Tarby's baby could not have strength together ; and the first baby to live was to stand as witness to a greater alteration in Mrs. Chickney. Still Tarby's wife would not have changed positions ; her heart had always yearned for a child of her own, to live and grow up, and be a comfort to her when Tarby went away, and she took her failing health as part of the bargain.

“And I'm not going to *drag* about like this all my life, you know,” she said to Tarby one day ; “why, every day I'm getting stronger !”

Tarby could not see it, and asked Mr. Glindon, who recommended the air of Hastings and port-wine, and lighter diet — say, a boiled chicken — and so on ; and as he might equally as well have ordered the air of Madeira, and a slice off a Phoenix, Tarby thanked him for his advice, and said he'd think of it. But Mrs. Tarby did gain a little strength, by slow degrees, without leaving Hannah Street, and strength of mind, too, to insist upon having the baby christened, and Owen, also, at the same time, which interesting ceremony took place in Waterloo Church, and went off with great *éclat*.

For the baby, who was christened Mary, after Mrs. Chickney, took so readily to the clergyman, whom, it probably fancied, was Tarby in disguise, that it nearly had its first convulsion when returned to the arms of its mother.

So time went on in Hannah Street ; and the world was wondering, as usual, how that time had slipped away, when it was summer again, and Mary Chickney was six months old. Easter and Whitsuntide had passed by that time, and Tarby had resisted all temptations, and remained sober throughout, and kept to his baby and his business, till the profits of the latter made ample amends for the expensive luxury of the former. Owen assisted with the baby, too, and relieved guard with Tarby and Mrs. Chickney, and learned half his school lessons with the infant Mary in his arms. So progress, especially moral progress, was made in Hannah Street ; and happiness was so near to these poor folk, that carriage-people might have envied them. But a flash of happiness here and there, to keep our hearts from sinking in our pilgrimage, and we should rest content ;

happiness is a fugitive sensation, that is gone in a breath, and children born of trouble cannot expect its duration.

Tarby had made a hundred promises to reform entirely ; he had tried sobriety for six months, and found it profitable, he said. Owen was gaining knowledge, and could already read and write, and work his sums out ; Mrs. Chickney was looking better, and the baby was as big as any two in Lower Marsh.

At that time, some six or nine months after baby's birth, Tarby was unfortunate enough to meet a friend, who had returned from America, rich enough to stand glasses round to all his ancient pals and brother costers. And Tarby took his glass with the rest, and returned home with bloodshot eyes and unsteady gait, and with his old quarrelsome fits upon him.

Tarby Chickney, once unsettled, took a full fortnight to compose, the days following the first relapse being an increase at compound interest, of all his reigning faults and weaknesses. It seemed likely to be a blank week, after Tarby's first start in the old direction ; and Mrs. Chickney always muttered a "Thank God !" though she was not a prayerful woman, when her husband was heard knocking at the street door, however late the hour, and however drunk and ill-tempered he might prove to be.

Owen, close on twelve years old, was a tolerable substitute for Tarby at this time ; young as he was, he could make a fair bargain at market, and sell his goods at a remunerative price afterwards ; and, therefore, the loss of Tarby's services was not felt, in a pecuniary sense, so much as in the olden times, when nothing came in as an equivalent to everything running swiftly and surely out. Still it was a miserable, unpleasant time setting in ; Tarby was satisfied with nothing, and Mrs. Chickney and the baby being weak, Owen came in for all the superfluous cuffs and shakings that Tarby had to spare on his return.

"He'll have his run out, Owen," said Tarby's wife ; "and then be just hisself again. Poor fellow !—he hasn't had a change lately—I dare say he was worried and hipped to death."

This consolatory assurance was delivered on Thursday night—the fourth night of Tarby's "run"—when Owen and Mrs. Chickney and the baby were sitting up for him, and the Dutch clock was ticking its way to two.

"He's rather later than usual," remarked Owen.

"Ah ! he won't be long now," affirmed the wife, who little dreamed that Tarby Chickney was never destined to cross

the threshold of that home again, and that the shadows to fall upon it were of a deeper hue, and were close upon her, to haunt that house for every hour of her after-life.

Owen, be it said, *par parenthesis*, was pretty certain of Tarby's whereabouts; he had stolen out before the shop was closed and seen Tarby at the "Three Compasses," dancing a kind of mad jig to a barrel-organ played by a grinning Italian, and surrounded by a mob, who began to impede the traffic and attract the notice of policemen; and he had no doubt—now the "Compasses" had closed—that Tarby had emigrated to the night public-house, near the cab-stand in the Westminster Bridge Road, where he would possibly remain till he became too uproarious, or was kicked into the street, or was given in charge to the police, an idea Owen did not think it worth his while to impart to the poor woman nodding over her baby by the empty fire-grate.

A single heavy dab on the outer door—a dab solemn and steady enough to be from Tarby in his soberest moods, and therefore calculated to arouse suspicion at once.

"The door, Owen—something's wrong!" was the quick exclamation of Mrs. Chickney, and Owen ran to the door and threw it back at once. He knew it would not be Tarby before he opened the door—Tarby would have accompanied his arrival that particular evening by trying to shake the house down, and bawling denunciations at Owen through the key-hole for not responding to his summons. He was half prepared for a friend of Tarby's or a policeman, but not for policeman 92, with his hat crushed into half its size, and his nose nearly doubled in magnitude.

"Where's Tarby?" cried Owen.

"In the station-house—I've been sent for a change of clothes by the inspector."

This was so remarkable an errand, that Mrs. Chickney ran to the door with her baby.

"He's got hurt in fighting, and hurt some one else—107. It's a bad job, I'm sorry to say."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!—may I come round to-night?"

"No; you're not wanted," said 92 in reply. "You can't come round—he'll be sent up to Lambeth police-court in the morning, and you can see him there. But we must make him decent for the magistrate."

"It's—it's nothing more than usual, is it?" she asked.

"Just a trifle."

"Oh, dear!" she sighed—"Owen, mind the baby, while I look up his other clothes, and keep away from the door as much as you can. Will you come inside?"

"Thankee ;" and 92 stepped into the shop and closed the door, and remained with his back against it, very stiff and upright—nothing like the conversational being with whom Owen had walked from Jenkin's Street. But 92 was on her Majesty's service, and, perhaps, the damage he had received had rendered him extra rigid and uncongenial.

He had nothing more to say concerning Tarby, and, when pressed, only repeated that it was a bad job, adding that it might be worse ; he couldn't say—nobody could say at present. He departed with the bundle which Mrs. Chickney had prepared for him, and the weary night seemed as if it would never go away, and bring the morning round for Tarby's examination.

Tarby's wife did little more throughout the night, than rock herself and baby in the chair she had occupied before the old, old news came home. The cloud was heavy over her, and there was no one to sustain by a false show of spirits then ; so she sat till it was time to move about and prepare for the visit to the police-court, where the fiat of the magistrate would be life and death to her in Hannah Street.

For however the punishment be merited by him who perpetrates the crime, the sentence must sweep down upon a crowd of innocent to whom the criminal is dear.

Mrs. Chickney was prepared to leave home at eight in the morning, although the magistrate at Lambeth was not likely to take his place till eleven. Owen opened shop as usual, and attended to all comers ; whilst Mrs. Chickney, with no heart for work, remained, with the parlour door shut between her and the world of Hannah Street.

But the parlour door could not keep the gossips out, and there were many in the neighbourhood who knew all about Tarby's last "sensation act," and were anxious to impart the intelligence, more or less exaggerated, to his wife. The wife was eager to hear the news, too ; and the gossips went one by one into the parlour, where they remained till the parlour became full, and the cotton skirts of late comers began to back amongst the greens.

It appeared to have been the customary street brawl, with everyone in a worse temper than usual, and inclined to hit harder. The quarrel had risen between Tarby and a policeman in the manner natural to Tarby's quarrels ; Tarby, pig-headed and personal with drink, and the policeman, who was new to the force, inclined to exhibit his authority with a little more flourish than was profitable to Lower Marsh policemen in general. Tarby had been shut out of the "Compasses" at twelve, and, being inclined to resent the

proceeding as an insult, had kicked and hammered at the doors until the new representative of order had requested him to desist. An argument on the merits of the case had been begun—broken off—begun again, till threats of locking-up had aroused all Tarby's virtuous indignation, who had resisted being taken by the neckcloth, and therefore knocked the policeman down. The confusion natural to policemen being knocked down ensued at once in Lower Marsh. The crowd, which had been collecting for the last five minutes, gathered more closely round the combatants, and swayed from pavement to road and from road to pavement, bawling in a hundred keys; tradespeople pulled up their up stairs window-blinds, and took reserved seats for themselves and families; the rattle cracked its warning to the night, and all the boys and girls and dogs of London appeared to swell the confusion and enjoy it. More policemen from the New Cut, James Street, and Frazier Street; more co-mates and brothers in drink to the rescue of the noble Tarby; women by some means mixed up in the quarrel, taking opposite sides and strong grips of each other's back hair, tearing at each other's face, and shrieking in C sharp; Tarby on his feet—then on his back—then on a policeman—then under half a dozen.

There is but one sequel to these street brawls: an increase of official force—a slackening of zeal on the part of those just sober enough to know that they are getting into trouble. Tarby was a prisoner; and one policeman, felled by the staff which Tarby had wrested from his hand, was carried away moaning to Tower Street, with a stream of people hustling after him, and commenting on the outbreak of the night.

These were the particulars offered to Mrs. Chickney in the back parlour of that shop wherein we have prophesied that Tarby will no more set foot; and Mrs. Chickney, taking heart from the details—for they seemed no more new and strange than half-a-dozen such incidents that had happened in times past, and of which Tarby had been the hero—took heart, and thought he would get his month, perhaps two, and "things were not looking worser than they had looked once or twice before, and she must make the best of it—there!"

Leaving to Owen the sole direction of the business, Mrs. Chickney, toiling under the weight of the baby, set forth for Upper Kennington Lane, where is situated the Lambeth police court, at the back of the general line of houses, and having an ignoble, cow-shed kind of entrance, finishing off with an ugly-shaped and covered yard, where friends of prisoners and witnesses kick their heels till the court is opened, or their services are required.

Mrs. Tarby was accompanied by more of her female friends than the little court could decently accommodate, and there was much pushing and crowding when the uncivil young man in the office unfastened the door and let this ragged fringe of the general public enter. Mrs. Tarby and baby went in with the rest, and Tarby and two friends, in a bruised condition, took their places before the magistrate, after a few preliminary cases had been disposed of.

But Tarby's case was not to be settled that day or the next. The important fact that the policeman struck down last night was too ill to attend was delivered to the magistrate, and a minute after the case had been remanded, and before Tarby could be removed from the box, another messenger brought the startling tidings that the man was dead !

Tarby's bruised face took an unearthly hue, and his handcuffed hands fell heavily to his side. It was all up !—he felt that now—he knew that now, as surely as the woman did who fainted in the body of the court, and was carried out clinging to her baby, the one frail hope to hold to in the midst of a sea of trouble that was rising.

The man dead ! A verdict of manslaughter, perhaps murder, and a long journey for Tarby, or an end to him, that in his love of drink and heat of passion he had never dreamed of. And an end, also, to all the hopes of Tarby's wife—to the little ambitious dream she had had but lately, of taking a larger shop, perhaps in the Marsh itself, and buying a pony, which difficulties should not compel to sell again at Markshire Cattle Fair. An end to the fallacy that baby Mary would work such changes in her husband, that temptation would be resisted, and a new life begun, the happiness of which would be greater and more lasting than all the past experience, had presented an idea. Life, with her husband sober, her own old strength returning, Mary and Owen growing up, both a comfort and a blessing to her — both her children !

Yes, it was all over ! The curtain falls every day on scenes the brightest, and cuts the pleasant comedy in half, and drops its sombreness between it and the light. Why should the greengrocer's wife be spared, when queens and peeresses are weeping ? When Tarby was gone she would have her baby still, and her business, and many well-meaning, humble friends in Hannah Street, who, in a spirit of self-abnegation that richer folk might imitate, would lose half-a-day's work, a day's dinner, to keep her company and comfort when company and comfort were necessary to preserve her from wholly breaking down. The honest poor are hearty

sympathists with each other—would we were as near the kingdom of heaven as some of them.

It was settled at last, after inquest, and remand, and trial ; it was printed in the papers, and known in Hannah Street, and recorded in the books of the law, that Tarby Chickney was guilty of the manslaughter of policeman 107, and must suffer in consequence, and be transported beyond the seas—beyond that little baby, of which he thought so much now !—for the term of fourteen years.

And Tarby went away, after a painful interview with his wife and baby and Owen, the full details of which we spare the reader. Enough to say that, as they were passing from the grating behind which Tarby stood, he called Owen back in a hoarse voice, and said—

“Owey, lad, *she’s* been more than kind to you ; she has only you now. You won’t grow too big to forget her?”

“I !” cried Owen, dashing the tears away with the back of his hand ; “I !”

“You’ll be a man soon ; and I mayn’t live to come back, or she to see me come, Owey, though she tries to cheer me up by talking on ’em both—it’s like her ; but she’s broke down awfully. Look after her and the babby—you’re old enough. Lord, see how that babby is crowing at me now, and trying with her fat fists to get be-behind this i-iron work ! Take her away ; there’s a good little cha-ap !”

And Owen hurried mother and child away, and closed the interview.

“Mother,” said Owen that night, when they were together in the parlour, and baby was asleep across Mrs. Chickney’s lap ; “Tarby asked me to take care of you and baby. Am I big enough?”

“I hope so,” said she, wearily.

“He thought I might grow too big to forget you some day—is *that* likely?”

“No.”

“As if my heart did not grow, too !”

“For both of us?” pointing to the baby.

“To be sure.”

“I am so glad of it !” she said ; and Owen hardly understood her at that time.





## CHAPTER IV.

### TEMPTATION.

**C**ONSOLERS are hard to be comforted. Those readiest with good counsel, and happiest in their remarks on the fitness of things to our moral condition, turn away from the well-meant advice when their own time is come to bear the shock of affliction. The old story of preaching and practice, wherein the practice is scanty, but wherever the preachers are legion.

Tarby's wife could not take consolation from others; it was a harder task than attempting to stem half the sorrows of Hannah Street. She could not find a bright side to life now. Tarby was gone; and, though he had not been the best of husbands, though he had been ill-tempered and unjust, and even cruel in his drinking days, yet she took his absence to heart, and looked an older woman by a half-score years. She had talked so much of the better days, that when the worse confounded all her arrangements, she gave up the struggle, and confessed herself vanquished.

Even little Mary helped to rouse her but little—for Tarby's heart had been open to that child; and what was to become of it in the future, stretching so dimly and far away from her prescience? Still she must strive to live on, for little Mary's sake; and Owen was a good lad, who worked hard for her, and, in her trouble, was already her reward for that past charity which rescued a waif from the world. Owen, at twelve years of age, too, attempted the part of consoler; talked of fourteen years as fourteen days which were to vanish away and bring Tarby home again, and boasted of what he could do in the interim to keep the business going, and the business arrangements in fair order. Owen, thrown early on the world, and possessed of no small amount of

native shrewdness, did the marketing and the hawking, and kept the wolf from that door at which 92 had arrived with fatal news.

Looking at it as a business speculation, the absence of Tarby did not very seriously affect the funds of the Chickneys, the additional income arising from Tarby's exertions having been generally dissipated in holiday times by drink and fines for assault. The change rendered Owen's visits to the free school somewhat uncertain—for Mrs. Tarby was not always strong or energetic enough to attend to the shop of an evening then; but Owen worked with renewed vigour when fortune favoured his attendance, and begged for more lessons at home to make up.

Mr. Graham, the tutor of the school, could not help paying a little extra attention to Owen in particular; there was something singular in the lad's intense desire for knowledge—in the energy that mastered the difficulties in his way, and craved for further tasks that would absorb his time, and occupy his leisure moments in Hannah Street when business was slack, or he was sleepless. Owen was not alone the scholar to whom the opening of that school had done good, and taught a moral to that pig-headed section of society which sees harm in driving ignorance from the heads of the hard-working; but he evinced alone at that time a restless eagerness for improvement, which each step further away from the past only served to enhance. Give him learning, heap task-books before him, set him arduous lessons for the next school-day, and Owen drew his breath more free, and in his eyes there was a greater light.

To such a lad, it may be imagined, two years of even fugitive teaching worked wonders; and Owen, at fourteen, when the new mother had somehow settled down to her lot—if she were not resigned to the inevitable—was scarcely recognisable. The new mother was weak, and had the face of an old woman, and Owen was a strapping lad, with a bright, intelligent countenance, that did one good to see in Hannah Street. Mr. Graham had not forgotten the religious instruction of his favourite pupil—Owen was the show-boy now when visitors came—but Owen, although ready to learn everything, had not evinced any great partiality for theological doctrines, or profited so much thereby as his tutor desired.

Owen's was a practical, even a hard mind, that saw no progress in life derived from a Bible study—which guessed that figures, and good handwriting, and general knowledge, would raise him in the scale without it. He had not ex-

perienced real trouble, and knew nothing of real comfort ; the Bible was a matter of history—and he learned his task, and turned to another with composure. The seeds of early training, or that lack of moral training which is in itself an evil culture, must bear some fruit, or have some tendency to spoil the tree transplanted to new soil—some of the original nature will cling to it, and permeate amidst its better life ; and Owen was to be no exception to the rule.

He learned right and wrong from his school Bible ; he could shudder at his early life, and the road he might have followed—it taught him to be grateful, even to an extent thankful—but it warned him not. It was a study prosecuted with no ardour, and there were other books he preferred to his Bible—books of travel, and biography, and profane history, all of which he borrowed from the school library, and took to heart, and set himself many lessons therefrom of perseverance and will.

So Owen grew taller, and stronger, and more wise ; whilst Mrs. Chickney struggled to keep home together. He began even to see what a poor ignorant woman she was, who had afforded him shelter when a shelter was salvation ; but such knowledge only strengthened his love for her, and he was a considerate youth, who never wounded her by a word. He had grown tired of his present life, and the little business, and the baskets of greens, and the eternal round of hard work for scanty profit. He knew to seek his own way in life now would be better for his after-success ; but he evinced not by a word that such thoughts ever crossed him, and he turned from them angrily at times, as though they were temptations that wronged his love and gratitude. He was Mrs. Chickney's support, and without him there was the Union for the new mother and Mary, who looked up to him. He would live for them, toil for them all his life, if need were—remembering what Tarby's wife had done for him. He might be something better now than a lad wheeling fruit or vegetables about the street ; but he might have been a thief or a felon, if the helping hand had not been offered, and the kind words spoken in good season. In the fulness of his boy's heart, he had vowed to serve a life-time ; and he did not flinch from his word in the days of greater confidence.

The temptation beset him in strange shapes occasionally ; friends and enemies seemed to conspire to make his position one of trial—for his enemies taunted him and mocked his position, and his friends encouraged him to break from it and act for himself. Well for him he had a will of his own thus early in life—that even in this waif there were noble qualities,

from which heroes have sprung. May there not arise, even from these shapeless materials with which we work, as good a hero for a story-book as a Mayfair novelist creates? Surely all the virtues, noble sacrifices, and honest manliness of heart have not gone West yet, and may find room to live even in such a place as Hannah Street. We say *may*, for the discerning reader will take notice that to this present page we have not termed him who gives a name to these volumes—our hero. For we are young and cautious in authorship, and speak with a reserve.

Perhaps at this time John Dell was Owen's greatest tempter; for Owen met him more often, and John Dell had taken an interest in him from the date of the lesson-book. He had watched Owen's progress more narrowly than that lad himself was aware of. He was a self-taught man, and saw his life once again in him. He lent him books that he knew the boy would study and improve from; and he followed his career step by step, though he appeared to be minding his own business and never interfering.

He interfered at last, however, and became the tempter. Ruth Dell was fourteen years old then—tall for her age, and possessing those long arms, and bony elbows and fingers, which girls of fourteen, giving promise of exceeding the average standard of height, invariably exhibit. Owen had called to return a book that had been lent him, and found Dell, with his niece Ruth. Two minutes before there would have been company at No. 6, Jenkins Street; for Owen had found 92 in the act of closing the door of his brother's house behind him, and exchanged a good-evening with him, which was graciously responded to, 92 being off duty, and having the buckle of his stock loosened. There was a strange freemasonry, be it observed, between 92 and Owen, which neither could have explained had he been called upon—a secret kind of understanding, which embarrassed Owen in particular. In old times—lying so far distant, thank God, that the view was misty and the perspective confused—the knuckles of 92 had been driven into Owen's neck, and 92 and he had been followed by a street-mob to Tower Street—an unpleasant reminiscence, that brought a tinge to Owen's cheek when in 92's company. 92 appeared to be always remembering this fact, Owen thought, although, from the manner of the Dells towards him, the secret had possibly not escaped.

And if it never escaped, he should be happy, feel himself a different being,—if only the story of the past life could sink further and further back with every day!

In 92's eyes there was the whole story, however, combined

with a quantity of suggestive matter, that gave a dreamy appearance to those optics. One might read at times admiration of Owen's energy, the doubt of its continuance, and then admiration and confidence together; but on all occasions there was the past story being pondered over when they met.

It was as evident on that particular night of their meeting, as on the night when Owen first became acquainted with the Dells.

"Learning again! Owen Owen!" with a glance at the volume in Owen's hand, 92 had said.

"Yes, Sir."

"You must have rattled on in the edificationary line," he had added, with a dash at a hard word as usual; "to get through John's books. Glad to see it, lad!"

And on their next meeting, which occurred one afternoon in Lower Marsh, with Owen on the shafts of his barrow, reading through a slack day, 92 gave to his eyelid a tremulous motion, which might have been a wink, as he pointed to the barrow, and said—"Move on, my lad; it's an obstruction, and my orders are strict. Move on here!" Owen understood by that peculiar *æillade*, that 92 wished him to see that no offence was meant; but duty was imperative when a man was buttoned to the chin, and had something on his wrist. And Owen wheeled on his barrow submissively.

But we are stepping out too rapidly, and forgetting Owen's temptation. It was Michaelmas Day, and Mr. Dell was looking at his quarter's receipt for rent as Owen entered, holding it at arm's length, and frowning, as though it were a warrant for his immediate execution.

"I improve the man's house, and build a little workshop, with a furnace in it; and he takes advantage of my not having a lease, and raises my rent!" he was saying, with his usual rapidity, as Owen entered. "Such a man as that it would be a luxury to kick, Ruth."

Ruth was at needle-work by the window, and doing her best to ruin a pair of fine hazel eyes, by working "between the lights."

"Well, it was not business on my part; but I was in a hurry to run up a workshop, and had faith in human nature—Hallo, young man! why didn't you knock?"

"92 was going out as I came in, Sir," replied Owen; "but I knocked at the parlour door before I turned the handle."

"And very proper, too; though I was too busy to take notice of your summons," said he. "Ruth, my dear, put the receipt on the file directly. Well, young man, good-evening to you."

Owen returned the tardy salutation, and bade a good evening to Ruth Dell, who replied, "Good-evening, Owen," in her usual kind manner. And Owen liked her manner exceedingly and thought it a great improvement on her uncle's.

"So the book's done! What have you learned from it?"

"Oh! a great deal."

"It's the life of a man who worked his own way. I like such men," and he looked as fiercely at Owen, as though Owen had expressed an opinion the very reverse of his own.

"It makes one want to try—don't it, Sir?"

"It makes the right sort try at once—not think of trying."

"Ah! if they had the chance!" said Owen, with a half-sigh that did not escape the quick observer before him.

"The right sort makes the chance—not waits for it."

Dell gave the usual jerk of his head to the customary jerk of his voice; but Owen felt there was something more implied than a mere emphatic comment on passing events. And Owen was right.

"Sit down, Owen. Let us talk this matter over—you and I. Are you pressed for time?"

"No, Sir."

"Sit down, then, and don't make that confounded shuffle with your feet."

Owen was always a little nervous in John Dell's presence; he had long since seen much in him to respect and admire; but to the present time he had never become accustomed, or relished, his sharp manner of address. A man so naturally kind, so anxious, in his way, to do a little good, might have had a more agreeable way with him to advantage, Owen fancied.

Owen sat down and left off shuffling, and Dell began—

"Look at me. You know what a genius means?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm not one—I never shall be."

Owen could not very well reply to this, and Dell continued, "You've been reading the life of a genius—a genius for mechanics—who made his fortune, and rose from the crowd. I'm not a genius, and may never make my fortune; though I pushed my way for a beginning in much the same way as he did. He went further, and I, finding my level, came to a stop, or nearly so. All right and proper, and nothing to grumble at, is there?"

"Not that I see, Sir."

"You appear to see pretty clearly for a lad of fourteen. Don't you see an opening for yourself?"

"No, Mr. Dell; besides——"

"There, don't begin a lot of 'besides,'" he interrupted; "if I hate anything *besides* cats, it's 'besides,' and 'ifs,' and 'supposes.' They hamper honest men to death!"

Owen did not enlighten him further. He was about to speak of Tarby's wife, when John Dell had interrupted him; and it was a story that perhaps his listener would hardly understand, and, therefore, better left alone.

"I've been round to your school!" was Dell's sudden remark.

"Indeed!"

"I've been bothering my head about you, and getting to the rights of things. Graham tells me you are head boy, and know as much as he can teach you—that it all rests with yourself now, or with higher masters than you or I can afford. You're quick at figures, you know a little English, you can speak for yourself, and—you trundle a barrow all day!"

"Yes," and Owen bit his lip.

"I don't say you'll ever be like the man you read of in that book—it's not probable; but nothing can hinder your getting on a little, if you carry the same 'gumption' into the world with you. You should advance, boy."

Owen nodded, as if it were very good advice; but it was a listless recognition of the interest felt in him, and irritated John Dell in consequence.

"Any fool can wheel a barrow, and shout out the price of what he has to sell upon it; an idiot can carry a basket of greens home. You've shown energy in some things—why do you lack it at a time when your whole life may be influenced by one step?"

"I don't lack it—I don't like my life—I——"

Owen stopped and coloured, and Ruth Dell, who had found it too dark to continue her needlework, sat with her back to the window, interested in the dialogue.

"Go on," said Dell.

"Oh, it doesn't matter!"

"But it does; for there's a reason—and if it's a bad one, the sooner we scotch it the better."

"I've been left in charge of Tarby's wife, who's been a mother to me," said Owen, with some of Mr. Dell's abruptness. "Tarby's wife must go to the Workhouse without me; and she sha'n't. Tarby left her and little Mary to me," cried Owen, with excitement; "and I'm proud of my trust—there!"

John Dell, nursing one knee, and biting one thumb nail, kept his great gray eyes fixed on Owen. He made no reply for several moments, as Owen paused, and fought a little for

his breath ; but still watched him, as a microscopist might watch the labours of an ephemeron under his lens. He was touched by the boy's earnestness, but he would not show it—he was vain of his self-command, as are all men, if they have any of that article to boast of. For a reason of his own he would go on tempting ; and he checked a speech of his more impulsive niece by a frown that sent her back to obscurity.

“I might obtain you the first step in the foundry. I am likely to be foreman of a shop soon, and then there's my own life to follow step by step. There is no cleverness wanted, only fair steadiness and strength.”

Owen shook his head and thanked him. His heart warmed to the offer, and he was grateful ; but he swerved not for a moment from his old promise to Tarby. Ruth Dell letting him out that night whispered—

“You have acted for the best. My uncle thinks so. Don't look so dull, Owen,” and Owen had pressed her hand in return for the words that fell so gratefully.

“You are very kind, Miss, to say so. I am glad *you* think so,” he added with emphasis, as he turned away.

Ruth was only fourteen years of age, but the earnestly uttered words made her colour, although she was a girl who had never even had a boy sweetheart, but had been frightened of boys all her life, as rough creatures in trousers, who were always flinging stones, and reviling their seniors.

And Owen was glad that Ruth Dell considered he was right, for Ruth was a superior being in his eyes, and held in greater estimation than her father. Ruth was a clever girl, who was always doing good. She had become a Sunday-school teacher lately, and the pupils were progressing under her care. John Dell had told him so much of Ruth too ; how quickly she learned everything, and how she took to everything, and excelled in it, even to the piano, at which she only practised in the room of her finishing governess. For John Dell had launched into the extravagance of a finishing governess for his niece. When he saw talent he was anxious to develop it—and her talents would be her living, or render her at least independent of adversity some day. She had been a careful housekeeper to his lonely bachelorhood, and the very best of children, and he could but evince his gratitude by giving her the best of educations. People in Jenkins Street, who knew all about it, thought John Dell was very foolish to afford her an education so much above her position and his own, and that the result would be ingratitude and unbecoming pride.

But John Dell knew better, for he understood Ruth's



character, and how a high education would adorn it, as jewels and lace and other vanities adorn certain phases of beauty, let the poet say what he may. Ruth would always be gentle and loving, let her have that which is "most excellent," to render her fit for any station in the future. She would presently leave him and go out as pupil-teacher and governess, and then every "extra" for which he paid would be of service to her, God bless her !

And Owen said "God bless her," too, that night, for his heart had been troubled, though not shaken by the words of her uncle. Dell was a man who did everything for the best, and had a high opinion of what was man's duty to himself as well as to his neighbour ; a man who could argue and put things in their most presentable light, and say plain truths, from which there was no escape.

No escape ! And though Owen, under his counter, felt the weight of them, he was a willing prisoner, whose gratitude was greater than his pride. Self-abnegation is an heroic quality, so from this time forth then, O reader, let us write him—*our hero !*





## CHAPTER V.

### THE NEW AND THE OLD.

**T**AKING advantage of the absence of Owen, John Dell, who was a man who let not grass grow under his feet, made his appearance in Hannah Street. It was a few minutes after half-past four, the time between that and five allowed for tea to the workers at the foundry. But he was inclined to resign his tea for one night, if need were, although Ruth might wonder what had become of him, and fidget herself about some accident at the great place, the high roofs, and tall brick shafts of which shadowed the street wherein she dwelt.

Mrs. Chickney was sitting in the shop, hard at work at a little frock for Mary, who, perched on the counter, had half a carrot, a turnip, and the head of a penny doll for toys, whilst her mother laboured diligently. The woman who had given way, and was mourning still for Tarby, was not a woman to sit idle, when there was work to do and some one to work for. For herself, she was supine—it did not matter to her what people said or thought; and John Dell, standing in the doorway, was puzzled to assign a reason for so very clean and bright a baby, and so very dusty and untidy a mother.

“You know me by name as a customer, Mrs. Chickney?—John Dell,” he said, by way of introduction, as he entered the shop.

“Yes, Sir,” she answered languidly.

“I’ve come to have a little talk with you—there’ll be no offence meant?”

Mrs. Chickney looked at him with a mild surprise. His smartness even seemed to awaken in her some slumbering

elements of her own old character—for she answered with a briskness very new to her in those days—

“To be sure, Sir—and no offence meant. Where’s the one to take it in its wrong sense?”

The one to take it now and then in that sense was transported for fourteen years, and she thought so the moment afterwards, and fell to zero. Everything would remind her so of Tarby!

“Perhaps the articles are not so good, now Tarby’s gone,” she said wearily. “I suppose it’s that you’ve come about.”

The articles were a great deal better; but Tarby’s merits had magnified by distance, and it was a happy time when he was free, and had made things look better to *her*.

“No!—I’ve come about Owen.”

“Oh! what’s he done?”—and she looked up with a hasty expression of alarm.

“Nothing, woman—don’t jump like that and try to frighten me. He’s done nothing, and in more senses than one, too.”

“And——”

“And he ought to have done something by this time. A brisk lad, with good sense, good temper, and some knowledge of English. Do you understand me?”

“Not yet, Sir.”

Tarby’s wife put down her work, and took her child into her lap, and was all attention.

“For a lad half brought up at evening-school, and half self-taught, he’s got on well,” said John; “and would get on better, if not hampered.”

“Who hampers him?” enquired Mrs. Chickney, with a heightened colour—“is it this place or *me*, or baby here? Oh, Sir! he hasn’t been complaining?”

“No; he’s a good lad,” was the sharp answer.

“Ay, the best of lads as ever grewed up—a son to me, who never complains or gives me a hard word. Isn’t that a deal to say, Sir?”

“It is,” said Dell; “and it’s more to say that you cannot see how his slavery here is keeping him down. I could find him a berth now, where he would earn his twelve to fifteen shillings a-week, if he were quick and clever; and he can’t take it because he’s a greengrocer’s boy, who must run on errands and wheel a barrow. And I can’t persuade him to take it.”

“Can you expect me?” asked Tarby’s wife, with a flash of her old shrewdness—“me he helps so much?”

“No.”

“Ah! then you may; I aint been a friend to him all my

life, to stand in his way now. I'd rather go to the workus than that."

"Does this business bring you in any money?"

"I've managed to save a little lately."

"Won't it pay you to have some one else to manage it, and let Owen board with you?"

"It may—it mayn't. I don't know where the some one's to come from, and I aint so sweet on the place as I was. I thought once I might struggle on till Tarby came back; but there's no waiting twelve years here, and I growing weaker every day. Still, I won't stand in Owen's light—I have made up my mind, Sir—you're right."

"You'll have to argue with him, for he's a stubborn lad, and blind as a bat to his own interest. There's no need for any hurry; but it's a pity he's here, and—and I take to the lad—there!"

John Dell looked as if he had said a very foolish thing, and wished to brazen the matter out.

"You should have been a married man, Sir?"

"Eh!"—and John Dell's eyes protruded more and more, and his face for a moment underwent a change.

"You're fond of lads and children; you brought up your own niece like your daughter—like a lady born a'most—Owen's told me everything."

"Owen should mind his own business," was the gruff response.

"And you have been very kind to Owen, and you won't find him ungrateful. Poor lad!"—with a little sigh—"as if I hadn't knowed before you told me, how I was standing in his way—as if it hadn't worried me nights and nights. Heigho! I wish I had a friend to go to."

"Have you any relations?"

"No, Sir. I was an only child, and mother, and father, and father's brother and sisters all died early. We're an early dying lot!"

"And on Tarby's side?"

"There's one or two on Tarby's side; but then Tarby put 'em all out long ago, by marrying me, when he might have done better with Sall Sanders. They were very much agin the match!"

So even costermongers have their *mésalliances*; and there are differences and disunions amongst us, even to the lowest rung of the ladder. Amidst the grimly ridiculous at which John Dell smiled, he could but pity the woman, and in his interest for her forget the tea simmering vainly at home upon the hob.

"You'll think of all this then?" he said; "and as the shop is a living I should advise you to stick to it, and find another help."

"I've no one to help me."

"God!"

Dell spoke more sharply than even his wont; religious feelings were deep in his heart, and actuated most of his motives, though he seldom confessed it. He was a man who kept his religion to himself, who read his Bible and went to church, and was rather proud of making no show, when even making a show would have benefited his fellow-creatures. He had a horror of cant, and even feared a good example might be taken for an exhibition thereof. There was not a man at the foundry who had an idea of Dell's piety; even 92 was in the dark, and only 92's daughter but half read him. Therefore Dell spoke sharply, because he was vexed with the woman's apathy, and did not care to let her indifference to the present pass wholly unproved. Nay, he would have been glad to make a convert, if his intentions had not stood a chance of being wrongly interpreted.

"Ay, it's too late to think of Him!"

"What do you mean by too late?" cried Dell, taken off his guard—"have you only half an hour to live?"

"More than that, I hope"—hugging the child tighter to her breast, as though the suggestion had frightened her.

"Then there's time—think of it."

And Dell rushed from the shop and ran down the street, for the factory bell was beginning to ring the workmen back to labour, and to be behind time was not only a fine, but a slur to a man's reputation.

Tarby's wife did not put Mary back on the counter and resume the work from which Dell's appearance had distracted her. She sat with the child in her lap, gazing dreamily beyond the open shop front into the street. Dell had aroused many and strange thoughts; to none more strange than that to which his last few words had given birth. She could think of *that* and her duty to Owen too; they seemed to go together, and set her heart throbbing, and bring wish after wish to her lips. She had lost her old strength, was more liable to new impressions, was pining for some real comfort in the midst of her desolation, and this man had brought it her. He was of a class not too far removed from her own; he was a hard worker, and could understand her, though he had little time to spare, and was a man more of action than thought. She felt that she could trust him—that he spoke fair and intended well—that it would be better for Mary, and

even Owen, if she could make up her mind to think a little of her God. Was it so hard a task to learn to pray, when she had so much to pray for?

Tarby's wife was very meditative for some days; then she broached the first subject that had helped to disturb her.

"Owen, I'm going to let the shop."

"Let the shop!" exclaimed our hero—"what is that for?"

"I'm tired of it, boy; I'm pining for fresh air, and the country, and the fields; I'm ill, and change will do me good, if anything will."

She spoke as if she doubted it.

"Take a week or a fortnight's holiday, mother, and leave the place to me," said Owen, quickly. "Then you and little Mary will come back well and strong."

"No; I shall live in the country—some little cottage or other, where rents are cheap—some little shop or other that I can manage by *myself*."

"What's to become of me, then?"

"You'll do better, Owen—you're fit for something better than this now."

"Am I?"

"You can write to Tarby and let him know what change we've made; and, perhaps, you'll come down now and then to see us."

"I know all about it!" cried Owen, jumping up, and overturning his chair. "Dell's at the bottom of this—don't tell me he hasn't been here putting all this in your head, for I know better! When was he here?"

"A week ago," she answered, with hesitation.

"He has no feeling—he don't understand me or you, or what you've done for me. I will have no alteration—I will share your troubles, and be that eldest son you've called me many a time. Oh! mother, I'm not the first-born in your heart if you seek to fling me off like this!"

"Oh, Owen!—Owen——"

And Tarby's wife began to sob passionately as the boy's arms stole round her neck and pressed her to him. She could understand the love she had gained, and its depth, for the first time in her life, perhaps. Owen tried to look too big to cry like a baby now, but he gave way at her emotion, and turned away his head to conceal the tears that silently welled over. But he was firm, and would have no alteration that should part them—he had promised to look after her and little Mary, and God be his witness he would keep his word!

Mrs. Chickney descended to the next question of a new

general manager, and Owen in the foundry where John Del worked, and Owen promised to consider that point when he had discovered the manager suitable for so delicate a task. Till then he put off the question *sine die*. Owen would have no more of it, and he began to arrange his books, and light the bat's-wing burner in the parlour, preparatory to a new course of study.

"He would have no more of it," Owen had said, as though he were a ruler of puppets instead of a puppet himself—a little knowledge had given him a little power, and he felt inclined to use it tyrannously. But there were changes to be made, despite his wish; and there was no power at his command to turn them by a single hair's-breadth. The change must come, for the Hand that never falters had recorded it.

Tarby's wife became more ill and weak: Owen had to go to the doctor's instead of the market, and, doctors doing no good, eventually to a physician, whose fee swooped away three-fourths of the week's receipts.

Tarby's wife was in bed, and could not always bear little Mary's noise now, and Owen was nurse to the child, while the old woman above-stairs—ever a good nurse when help was needed—came a third time in our experience into the back parlour to attend to Mrs. Chickney.

The physician doing no good, and the parish doctor and his new assistant making matters, if anything, a trifle worse, Owen bethought himself of the Mr. Glindon of old times—no longer an assistant, but, thanks to a lucky legacy, in business for himself, Newington way. Mr. Glindon had not pleased Owen in those times to which we allude, but then he had proved himself possessed of a certain amount of cleverness; and, since his success, people had begun to talk of him—as people do about you and me, reader, when their good words are of not half so much account as they might have been years ago—and to say what a rising M.R.C.S. he was likely to prove.

Owen went in search of Mr. Glindon, and fortunately met that gentleman in the fore-court of his house, making his way at a leisurely rate, that reminded our hero of their first interview, towards a smart private cab awaiting him. He had taken off his hat a moment, as if to ventilate it, and Owen could see that his hair was more flourishing than ever at the ends, and that his forehead looked more high and white.

"Your name's Glindon?"

"Yes."

"Will you come and see my mother at once—the other doctors are doing her no good, and I've faith in you."

"Thank you." And Mr. Glindon looked a little gratified.

"You did her good once—three years ago."

"Where does your mother live?"

"Hannah Street, Lambeth."

"Oh, so far as that."

And there was a perceptible change in Mr. Glindon's good-looking face.

"It can't make much difference with your cab—and you'll be *paid* at once, Sir."

The tone of Owen's voice possibly reminded him, despite the change of three years, of the boy with whom he had had some trifling altercation; and the abrupt mention of payment even a little nettled him.

"I have seen *you* before."

"Yes—I came for you once, Sir."

"The greengrocer's in Hannah Street, was it not?" was the next question.

Mr. Glindon had evidently an excellent memory.

"Yes, Sir."

"It's rather far for me, and I've no doubt your mother's in safe hands."

"Then you won't come?"

"I am very sorry" (Mr. Glindon was more polite in his new estate), "but I really don't think I have the time."

"Perhaps you don't like poor patients?" said Owen, bluntly.

"Not particularly" — with a supercilious glance at the querist.

"Isn't their money as good as other people's, or have you grown too much of an upstart?" said Owen, almost with a shout.

"Let me pass, my good fellow, and don't bawl in that outrageous manner here—I might have hesitated had you kept a civil tongue, but to such impudence as yours, I *never* give way."

And looking very hard about the mouth, he passed Owen, stepped into his private Hansom, and was whirled to more respectable thoroughfares than Hannah Street.

Owen felt sorry that he had lost his temper with Mr. Glindon; but there was something in the man—his looks, his manner, his implied superiority—that had roused our hero's antipathy, even though he had gone in search of him, as a clever practitioner who might do his mother good. Still, there were men more clever, and possessed of more experience—he would take that day to find them out.



And they were found out, and did no good to Tarby's wife, who was breaking up, and for whom there was no hope. She was a woman who had seen much trouble, and much trouble is the wear and tear which put the inner machinery quickest out of order. She had borne much with her husband, and helped to support him by her own example; but when he went away, half her life went too, and so there was only half the strength to battle with disease.

She called Owen to her side one day.

"Owen, I should like to see that Mr. Dell again."

"Why?"

"Not to ask a favour for you. Don't look so darkly at me."

"I, mother!" and Owen did his best to smile.

"But I want to see him. He's one of the few, I think."

"The few?"

"The few good, and willing to do good. Will you ask him to come?"

Owen went upon his mission, and saw Ruth, and left his message with her; and in the dinner hour John Dell, in fustian, made his appearance.

"Mr. Dell," said Tarby's wife, as he came into the parlour, "*you're sure there's time to think of it?*"

Weeks had elapsed since then. Tarby's wife had worked for little Mary, and argued with Owen, and then broken down. John Dell had gone early and late to the foundry, and been engaged at a hundred different tasks, and had his mind employed night and day, and yet each turned to the subject where it had been abruptly broken off, as though but a few minutes had elapsed since they had spoken of it.

"Whilst there is life there is time, and—hope."

"Will you sit down here, and try to help me on a way that is very dark. Shall I be robbing you of too much time?"

"No."

And the man of robust health took his seat by the dying woman's side, a picture than an artist might have rendered touching at that moment, for there was true religion allied to true simplicity. Let us leave them together. It is not our province to preach at any length in the pages of a book of this nature, and if the moral strike not home without our preaching, not all the homilies from the lips of our characters will affect the most sensitive of our audience. And novelists are players, not preachers, critics tell us, and should keep their place. So be it, we bow to a fair verdict.

And yet, upon second consideration, we are inclined to

have the last word too, for is there not a doubt where the novelist's task ends and the preacher's begins? In the novels professedly written for amusement, and eschewing a moral like poison, is there much amusement offered us of an original description? Do not fifty out of fifty-one begin, and continue, and end in the same manner, and is not the "damnable iteration" tedious? Surely a little more morality, if professed morality, would do no harm to our three-volume creations, if we could slide the ingredient carefully in, and not plaster our pages with wise aphorisms. And be it understood, that when the true novel is allied to the true moral; when the moral shall not be sacrificed for effect, and the effect considered of importance, and not buried under dreary dissertation, there will be a revolution in letters, and a success undreamed of even in these book-reading times.

John Dell and Tarby's wife remained half an hour together, and Tarby's wife seemed more at peace with herself and the world after his departure.

"He is a good man," was her only comment on the interview, which was not the last between them; for in his dinner hour, and after work in the evening, his grave, earnest face would light up that little back-room, as the face of a dear valued friend always lights up our homestead. Owen remained in the shop during these long conversations, only the old woman nurse was a witness and auditor. Dell's visits lasted a week or more, with doctors calling every day, and keeping Hannah Street lively; and then John Dell brought his favourite clergyman to talk to Tarby's wife "better than he could himself," albeit the invalid was of a different opinion.

And then came the last day, when physicians and surgeons were of little use, and all that they had prophesied looked nearer truth, on entering that room. Then, as is noticed in more cases than her own, Tarby's wife became nervous, and irritable, and fearful of the future—not so much her own future as Owen's, and that child of three years old, who went in and out of the parlour, wondering what it all meant, and why mammy lay so still, and people's voices were hushed, and she herself bidden eternally to make less noise.

"Owen, isn't it late enough to put the shutters up?" Mrs. Chickney asked, when it was eight in the evening, and John Dell had looked in and gone again. Owen was sitting by the bedside, and the old nurse was in the shop with Mary.

"Almost; shall we close early to-night, and have a long evening together?"

"It does not matter."

Owen looked anxiously at her.

"They have told me the worst as well as you, dear—there's no occasion to keep it quiet. I'm not afraid to talk of it."

"That's well," murmured our hero.

"I'm not afraid to die—I have not done much harm in my life, and I've not forgotten Him at the last ; and yet I'm not happy, Owen."

"You don't mind telling me all that keeps you anxious, mother?"

"No."

She paused a moment to fight with her breath, which was very weak and low, and then held her hand to Owen, which he took and clasped between his own.

"You have been a kind lad—a good son," she murmured—"may God bless you, and lead your steps aright. You will write to Tarby, and tell him how I remembered and prayed for him at the last?"

"Yes."

"You will begin a new life like after I'm gone—with the Dells and others. You may grow too big to think of this day with anything 'cept shame."

"Do you think so, mother?"

"Well, I think not ; but I'm—I'm afraid !"

She had changed colour so, that Owen had started to his feet to run for the doctor, when called back by her faint voice.

"Don't leave me, Owey, dear—I've something more to say."

Owen resumed his station by her side, and her hand with a great effort made its way between his own again.

"Tell me what is to become of Mary, my little baby, that brought so much misfortun' with the blessing of her coming?"

"Trust her to me."

"You will care for her, till she is old and can care for herself?—you will do your best to serve her?"

"With all my heart and soul !"

"Sometimes" (with a sigh) "I'm wicked enough to wish that she could die along with me—both going away together seems to me to be happier for both !"

"Trust her to me," said Owen again.

"In your own struggles for a better life, remember her ; in your own hopes let her have a little share ; in that heart you told me once was a-growing and a-growing with you, keep a place for her !"

"Mother, I will never forget her. She shall be the sister I will love and work for—she——mother, do you feel much worse?" he cried, hastily.

"The—the child!"

Owen darted into the shop, motioned the woman to hasten in search of the doctor, caught the child in his arms, and bore her back to the room.

"Mother, here is little Mary—will you speak to her before you go, and say good-bye? Oh, mother! pray God to bless this guardianship of mine!"

She smiled faintly, and her lips moved at his request; but the flame was dying out, and the messenger was waiting. As the child was held towards her mother, she smiled still more faintly than before, and died, with Owen sobbing at the bedside.

\* \* \* \*

It had begun to snow an hour afterwards, when the shutters were closed, and Owen was standing at the door whilst the old woman went through that ghastly work of "streaking," which old women of her species seem to delight in. She had nursed her tenderly, and done more than her duty; she would have been glad to see her recover, but, the worst having happened, she set to work at her new task, and took snuff over the deceased, and had one or two crones, who scented the dead as vultures might, to look in for a moment or two, and offer their instructions.

Little Mary had not gone to bed yet, but stood by Owen's side, and held his hand, and watched with him the snow drifting down the narrow street, in which there were grief and mourning.

As they watched, there passed them slowly and unsteadily the figure of a woman, at which Owen recoiled and drew back a step with Mary; for the figure was well known to him, and five years had not changed it. It had been advancing towards them down the street for several minutes, creeping in the shadow of the houses, and pausing once or twice to steady itself by clutching at occasional window-sills and shutters. When Owen had seen it first he had been struck by something in its manner, walk—even in the way the shawl was worn, with the ragged fringe trailing in the mud, to which the feet of passers-by had trodden the snow that had fallen hitherto. He had recoiled when, passing under the street-lamp, the face was held up for a moment, and had been seen in all its drunken vacuity of expression. The face had haunted his dreams and troubled his waking thoughts too long not to scare him then; and his impulse

was to retreat into the shadow, while the woman passed and turned the corner, breathing hard as though she had been running.

Shadow of crime, as it were—reflex of his past estate, from which he had emerged—still it was the mother who had borne him in shame and sorrow, and she might be starving, or full of desperate thoughts.

Relinquishing little Mary's hand, his second impulse carried him into the street which she had recently entered. No signs of her—her footsteps merged in a hundred others—nothing in the wintry streets but a lean cat, which was stealing across the road, looking right and left, and suffering from nervous trepidation.

Owen ran bareheaded a little way, but saw no sign of her, and felt perhaps it was better for them that they had not met just then.

It was a strange chance—or a stranger working of that mysterious element which is not chance, but is akin to Providence—that had brought the mother into the same street that night. As the new mother died, who had saved Owen from temptation and given him a home, so stepped into the light the mother of old, who had deserted him, and taught him but things evil. It seemed as if the good were dying out, and all the ills from which he had escaped were drifting back with that night's snow !

It was a time for morbid thoughts, and he could not escape them ; in the bitter moments of such a loss—and such a recovery—he could but let them master him, and wonder what the end would be.



## BOOK III.

RATTLE-GROUND.



## CHAPTER I.

### SEVEN YEARS.



WE design this chapter as a record of the seven years that have passed since Mrs. Chickney departed this life, and left her daughter Mary to the care of an adopted son. The chances and changes natural to seven years have passed over the heads of those to whom prominence has been given in this history—time has moved with them and worked wonders, and set them on their varied paths of life, the end of which lay hidden in the impenetrable Beyond.

To speak of Owen in particular is to allude to the majority of those good friends of ours who have already made their bow to a critical audience. The life of our hero has become so interwoven with theirs, and owes its progress so much to their own, that in keeping to our central figure we lose not sight of those who have their parts to play in future pages of a story somewhat strange.

Possibly the reader is prepared for progress in Owen—does not expect to find him still in Hannah Street, from which the first step was made, and from which dates so much of regeneration. Seven years place Owen on the threshold of man's estate, take him out of his teens, and set him before us to re-copy.

Life has begun in earnest with him, and it is an earnest face that meets one's own. There is vitality in it, and in these days of platter-faces, of stupid-looking, simpering, young exquisites, whose soul is in the set of their shirt collars, such a face is pleasant to come across. A dark countenance is that of Owen's, inclined to be swarthy, and its good looks a matter of doubt, and requiring the opinion of a whole jury of ladies. It is a peculiar face, the features sharply cut, the lips a little too thin, the eyes possessing that searching

quality which, in a person who dislikes to *meet* people's eyes, produces a sensation the reverse of pleasurable. And yet it is a frank, intelligent face, and the *a la militaire* crop of the back hair gives the head a lightness and ease that carries it well on his shoulders. Owen is above the middle height, of a slight, well-proportioned figure, that is a little at variance with his feet and hands, the former of which are small, and the latter large and bony. Characteristic hands those of Owen's, not attempting to escape observation by large cuffs, but fairly displayed by having the coat sleeves turned back above his wrists. Shrewd observers have pretended to judge character by the hand, and taken it as an index to the mind of its owner, and, no doubt, there are some hands which are extremely suggestive. Owen's are, at any rate; and bony as they may appear, they are well shapen, and imply a delicacy of touch when occasion requires as well as a firm grip that a nervous man would object to have at his neckcloth. They tell of strength and firmness—a man asked to judge by their appearance in inaction would not have taken them for the hands of a vacillating, easy-going man—they seem hands that can make a way for their owner through the briars and underwood of the world's wilderness; that may be torn and gashed in their progress, but, flinching not from the danger, will press on to the end—to the prize that may hang there, or the bubble that may burst in their grasp.

Looking back on the path trodden by our hero, let us mark his progress, and see how he has fought his way. From such a starting-point, in a world that is full of barriers, and is sceptical and unbelieving, he has worked hard to gain the vantage-ground from which we take up his story.

Making the best of the stock-in-trade, fixtures, and effects of the little shop in Hannah Street, and investing the same in a savings' bank for Mary Chickney, Owen, acting on the advice of John Dell, friend and counsellor at this juncture, had placed Mary in charge of an old female friend of Dell's mother, resident in a Surrey village, a convenient distance by railroad from London. Of Mary's progress in her new home more anon; at present we have Owen before us.

Having fortunately placed his ward in good hands, it became the young guardian's interest to look out for himself; and here John Dell, to whom he had already been indebted for so much advice, came with his shrewd common sense to assist him.

"It is a rough, hard life at the foundry, Owen," said he; "but you are not afraid of work, and one can push his way there, if he keep steady. I will speak to Mr. Cherbury."



And old Mr. Cherbury, with whom Dell was a favourite, and who had recently made a foreman of Dell, and given a considerable lift to his position in life, took Owen into a service that necessitated a thousand to fifteen hundred pairs of hands. And in this great factory, where the noises were never still, where night and day some furnace roared, some hammers rung, some men toiled at over-work, Owen began his new life, and might have continued to plod on there, and have become in time another John Dell, had not Mr. Cherbury—an eccentric old gentleman, whose soul was in the great factory his perseverance had reared—observed the lad, when he was seventeen, studying some book over an employment that required but a mechanical and regular application of the hammer. So earnest a study, under circumstances so disadvantageous, pleased Mr. Cherbury. He could remember an incident in his own life akin to it; for he was a self-taught man, who had worked his way upwards. He questioned Owen as to the extent of his abilities, held a conference of some length with Dell, ascertained Owen's skill as an arithmetician, and, much to the disgust of two clerks in the counting-house, promoted him to a desk, and made him junior assistant on probation.

The probation was hard, for the clerks were hard upon him, and the managing-man even—a just man enough—inclined to shrug his shoulders at Mr. Cherbury's new eccentricity.

Owen, after a week's desk-work, took counsel with John Dell, in John Dell's new house, in Kennington Road, where Owen lodged and boarded.

"I'd rather go back to the foundry," said Owen impetuously, after recounting one or two little slights, which had aroused his indignation.

"What for?" was the blunt rejoinder.

"I can work my way there—I can see my way clearly—I'm not sneered at by a couple of jackanapes, who think themselves gentlemen."

"Are the accounts too difficult?"

"No."

"Then keep where you are. What does it matter what the jackanapes say and think? A man will always have enemies when he begins to rise in the world. This is a grand step, Owen."

"Ay, most people think so."

"Don't you?" Dell jerked forth, with his eyes a few degrees more prominent in his head.

"I don't want to be a gentleman, and wear fine clothes,

Wasn't I happy enough in my fustian, Mr. Dell?—wasn't I more at home?"

"It is a matter of doubt how long you would have remained so," said Dell, in reply. "You're becoming such a man of cultivation."

"Ah! I can bear your hard thrusts."

And Owen laughed, and let his strong hand fall on Dell's shoulder, which it shook with a rough affection, that said a good deal for Owen's heart. For Owen had been three years with John Dell then, and learned to understand him.

"You're always cramming your head with something or other out of the books you buy—one day you would have learned that the men at the foundry were too rough for you or have wished that something higher and less laborious had lain open for you in the days when you were younger. Think yourself lucky."

"I'm lucky enough—if not so happy."

"You're not afraid of these young fellows—are you?"

"Afraid!"

And Owen, in his pride, looked afraid of no one just then.

"What is it, then?"

"Well," said Owen, after a little hesitation, "I need not keep it back from you—it's the past life I have sprung from that stands in my way. I feel I have no right where I am, and that a chance word may degrade me. The work of the hands for me seems more fitting than the work of the brain."

"You're an ass."

"Thank you."

John Dell did not know, Owen thought, of a past dark estate, lower than that to which allusion had been made. And Owen did not care to enlighten him, for many reasons; it was his one secret, jealously guarded—watched over with a morbid sensitiveness, that seemed ever on the increase with every upward step which he made.

"You're not talking like yourself. Dashed!" (John Dell's most vehement exclamation in excited moments) "if I don't think you've taken to novel-reading."

"Not I," said Owen, with sturdy contempt.

"Nothing in penny numbers?"

Owen shook his head.

"Well, it's not like you—that's all. I thought you could push your way anywhere."

"I will push my way here," said Owen, determinedly; "only I see the effort will be unceasing, and I know the friends will be few."

"They always are—good ones."

"And in the other case —"

"Drop it, drop it, drop it," cried Dell, with irritation. "You try a man's temper—there's something more than I see to account for it. Isn't there?"

And out came Dell's eyes again.

Owen coloured, but answered in the negative, and Dell regarded him dubiously.

"You're an odd fish to grow timid all of a sudden; you haven't been a bashful boy—rather free-spoken and *brassy-faced*, on the contrary—and if you won't tell me, why—I must find it out."

Owen laughed again, but it was not the free, hearty laugh that had characterised the more early period of that dialogue. He was certainly embarrassed, and there was an awkwardness in his timidity which did not escape his companion's observation.

However, Dell never cared to press a subject, on the free discussion of which there was a hidden reserve; and had he been even disposed to do so, the entrance of Ruth at this juncture would have frustrated the attempt—for Ruth was not always at home then, and her visits were made much of by John Dell.

Ruth was acting as pupil-teacher for two years, previous to entering a training-school and becoming a governess by profession. She had evinced a disposition for teaching at an early age, even before the end of our last book, when she was one in the ranks of Sunday-school teachers—a noble little army of volunteers, to whom society is not sufficiently grateful—and the taste had grown with her, and the desire to be independent of John Dell, and not hamper his means, become too strong to withstand.

"I can never repay you all your past kindness, my dear uncle," she had said; "but I am growing a young woman now, and must work for myself."

"Perhaps there is no occasion now," returned Dell—"although I *did* fancy it was best once."

"We are of the working-classes, and must not sit idling because the sun shines a little on the present—can we tell what may happen, uncle; and have I a right to neglect my share of labour?"

"Oh! my own words four years ago—but don't you think I shall miss you?"

"But I shall see you very often, and I must work and earn money, if it be only to pay you back something of—"

"Hold hard!" shouted Dell, "or I set my interdict on everything. Pay me back! Haven't you paid me back in

love and gentleness, and duty, years ago, my girl. Aren't you a true daughter to me now? Well, it's right to go, perhaps—it makes a lady of you, Ruth—and, as you say, we can't tell what may happen."

And Ruth went, and was working as pupil-teacher when the conversation that we have recorded occurred between Owen and Dell. Was there any clue to the secret of Owen's extra nervousness and timidity in the colour which went and came upon his cheeks as Ruth entered that day. Dell saw it, though he made no sign—he treasured it as a remembrance, though it was years before he spoke of it, and then not till a time of trouble for Owen, and of thought for himself."

But we, who are in the secret, need not wait so long to record our suspicions of the case; nay, more, it is essential to our story to mention that Owen, at seventeen years of age, was in love with Ruth Dell. It was an early age to begin love troubles, but Owen's mind had always been older than his years, and there was nothing unnatural in his loving early, and in loving the daughter of his benefactor. All his reminiscences of her were pleasant, and encouraged it; from the first day of their meeting, when she gave him her uncle's spelling-book till that time, he had thought of her; she had been allied with his progress—it was she whose smiles had rewarded his exertions, and whose silvery voice had ever cheered him onwards. He believed he had loved her at twelve years of age; and he did not marvel at the passion growing with him, though he kept it hidden deep, and with his older years sunk it prudently more and more from the garish outer world. He built no hopes upon it—that is, he would not have owned to hopes, however slight. He believed Ruth was far above him—that if she ever married she would wed far above him; and he kept his secret, and was content to worship her, and make from her the poetry of his life. When she went away as pupil-teacher he felt she was still further removed; but he did not love her less, and at one-and-twenty years of age the same true thoughts were at the bottom of his heart.

His was not a disposition to swerve; he mixed not with the world, but kept to one round of home and business, and was more grave and steady than most men of twice his years. It seemed as if his early experience of life had aged him before his time, and kept its shadow ever in the way of such light thoughts as come to youth, and are good for it. In other circumstances, under other influences, he would have thrown off his passion, and gained the mastery; but he sought not society, and he oscillated between the Kennington

Road and the great foundry day after day. He kept to his desk-work for the four years that succeeded the dialogue between John Dell and him. He did his work well, and gained the good-will of his employer, and rose in office year by year. Calculating on his chances in the future, he might have aspired to Ruth's hand, and looked forward to his marriage with her, the reader may suppose ; but to Owen she was ever far distant. His birth was a disgrace to him, and the incidents of his early life were known to Ruth's father. He had been a thief and in prison, and it was an ugly retrospect, which he could not shut out, or live down. 92 had not betrayed him, Owen believed, and he was grateful for that reticence, though the secret lingered in the officer's looks still, and he could read it in the broad, whiskered face that met his own occasionally.

During the last year in particular he met 92 more frequently—92 having retired from active service, and been rewarded with a Government pension, and a chronic kind of gout in both feet. 92 could afford to spend more time with his brother John now ; and as age had rendered him more loquacious, and more fond of hard words "that never came right," the good gentleman became somewhat of a bore to Owen, and possibly troubled John Dell more frequently than the younger brother cared to own.

It was about this time that Ruth, having passed her examination satisfactorily at a training school, was recommended to the post of governess of an institution erected amongst the Surrey Hills, for the health and education of the daughters of city tradesfolk, who had seen their better days.

There had been a family council in John Dell's house before Ruth's acceptance of the appointment. John Dell could but see it was a sure foundation to Ruth's future—supposing she never married, and were left alone in the world—and he was not selfish enough to seek to influence her for the worse, though he wavered respecting his old projects concerning her. It was right for her—nay, more, it was a very good thing for her ; and though, if it interfered with John Dell's happiness, she would consent to wait a while, yet her uncle could but press her to accept the offer. The distance between them was only a short railway journey, accomplished in three-quarters of an hour, and her uncle was to see her very often, and make the best of the position.

"Some of these days, Ruth, I may ask you to give it up and live with me again," said he, "when I can see my way clear to a competence, or am growing old, and need a daughter's love to keep the horrors from me."

"Perhaps you'll be looking after a wife, soon, John," said 92, who was present at this interview.

His brother made a wry face, but said nothing in reply.

"You're fifteen years my junibus—not quite forty yet, is it?"

"What's that to do with it?"

"And you'll be bringing down your young wife and babby to see Ruth, and then me at my cottage—vegetating in my unbuttonment, John—and so always glad to see you!"

92 had resolved upon a country life, and a cottage half a mile or so from his daughter's school, where Ruth could visit him after her work was done, in the leisure hours before bedtime. 92 had shifted for himself so long in the world, that, with the assistance of an old woman for an hour or two in the morning, he looked forward to a pleasant country life, and a bit of nice gardening, and a daughter's face to smile on him very often, "and nobody to move on," but the little boys, who came over the hedge after the unripe gooseberries.

God bless that daughter! He had not seen much of her in his life, and now he was going to begin and have his fair share of her. John could not grumble.

And John said "No" in his quick impatient manner, and felt it was all fair, and fidgeted a little behind the cloud of smoke from his tobacco-pipe, when his brother reminded him, that if he had married at a reasonable age, he would have had a gal, perhaps, like her.

"But John never did take to the softable sex," added 92, with a chuckle; and Dell said, "Right you are," and changed the conversation.

Ruth spent a long week with her uncle, at her uncle's house, previous to going away for good. During that week there occurred two events, which in their results affected the ultimate fortunes of our characters—the death of Mr. Cherbury, and a letter of Tarby's from Tasmania.

Old Mr. Cherbury was succeeded by his son Isaac, of whom more anon; and Tarby's letter, written by his own hand—for he had been taught writing abroad—apprised Owen of the information of a ticket-of-leave having been granted, and of his resolve to settle in the colony, even when his time was up, and he was free to return.

"You have kept my secret, Owen, from my little girl," he wrote; "God bless you for it—it was the best that could have been done for her and me. I have been thinking much of it since my ticket's come, and I'm a trifle nearer freedom. I shall never come back now—for her sake, I shall always be dead and gone. To know me is to know shame, you see,

Owen—so I died, like her mother, when she was young! Always keep that before her, and you can't be wrong. God bless her and you," he concluded; and Owen felt that the lines were from the heart, and that the change in Tarby was for the better.

So, altogether, it was a memorable week for Owen and the Dells, although the death of his employer added to John Dell's grave looks.

It was intended to have been a pleasant week, but that naturally proved a failure—the efforts of each and all were such miserable attempts at conviviality. Owen's attempts to give a light turn to events were possibly the most successful, although Owen felt the weight of the coming change as much as all of them put together. He was twenty-one years of age, and had a right to feel love-lorn—he with his strong mind and deep feelings. He would not have dropped so much as a corner of the mask then for all the world; for though Ruth was ever kind and gentle, it was a sisterly kindness, that never embarrassed her, and its very frankness gave him pain.

On the last evening, a Sunday evening, after their return from church with John Dell—John had made a church-goer of Owen, albeit Owen was still hard in his religious habits, and not deeply impressed by anything he had seen and heard hitherto—Owen contented himself with regarding Ruth over the top of the book he feigned to be perusing, and thinking how handsome a young woman she had grown, and what a lady she looked, sitting there in the firelight, with her uncle's hand in hers.

A tall young woman of a graceful figure, calm, and self-possessed, and, like Owen, looking older than her years. A young woman who was entering life with many fixed intentions, and in all earnestness of purpose—one who estimated her duties not frivolously, and had not made herself and the comforts of her new home the first consideration. She felt a great task was before her, and that she was young to undertake it; but she felt, also, strength for her work, and, the painful parting once over, that she should succeed in her vocation and gain the love and esteem of all her new little friends.

"Well, it's come at last, Ruth," said Dell—"we've talked about it a long time now, and here's the solid fact that no hammering will knock out of shape. It's tough work thinking of it now."

"But I'm not going abroad, like many of my old companions; even fifty or sixty miles will not divide us, uncle."

"No—that's true."

"You must come and see me very often."

"Yes, Owen and I," said Dell.

"To be sure," answered Ruth, looking towards the dark corner where Owen, enshrouded in window-curtains, was but half visible—"Owen, you are not asleep there?" she asked.

"No, no—I was thinking how Mr. Dell and I could manage it together—thank you, Ruth," he answered, hoarsely. Then, fearful that the change in his voice might be remarked, he came forwards, and took the lead in the conversation, till 92 arrived, and relieved guard by talking enough for the whole of them.

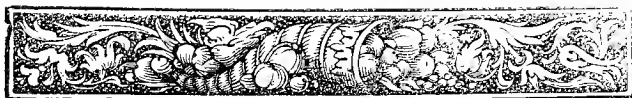
A dull evening, notwithstanding everybody's efforts to make it the contrary—a still duller morning, when the cab was ready to take Ruth to the station, whither John Dell was to accompany her.

We do not dwell upon any feelings or emotions in this chapter—we attempt no analysis. This is all retrospective, and before the curtain rises on the scenes and characters destined to appear and follow with us till the FINIS is written which puts an end to our chronicle.

Through the mist walk but dimly Owen and those destined to influence the mysterious after-life—the shadows come and go, and stealing up the mountain-side advance the figures to cross him, rival him, become his friends, advisers, helpers, enemies. He was not thinking of them, when, with his face a shade more pale, but with a grave unmoved face that might have been of stone, he watched the departure of John Dell's niece from home.







## CHAPTER II.

### A LADY PATRONESS.

**T**HE institution for the daughters of decayed tradesfolk of the City of London stood on the brow of a hill, at the foot of which lay the village of Ansted, Surrey. A steep hill to climb in hot weather, and with the sun on one's back—hard work at all times for the little feet belonging to the tradesmen's daughters, who were thus taught early and practically that the ways of life are toilsome and stony. Still, though the hill was high and the roads steep, there was a bracing air on its summit, and a fair view of the country. From the little dressing-room of John Dell's niece there was a range of hill and dale, and corn-field, dotted here and there by the mansions of the lucky ones in this world, and marked at rarer intervals by little nests of houses, constituting the villages of Surrey people, many of whom were as primitive and "countryfied" as though they had been living two hundred miles from London instead of two-and-twenty.

Ruth Dell was soon at home in this institution aforesaid, for she understood the art of settling down. She was a young woman who made the best of her position in life, and was quickly resigned to the unalterable. She knew there was little to regret in this instance; that her position in life had been bettered; that a sure independence was before her, and that her uncle's long dream concerning her had been realised. For the first few days in her new home, with a world of new faces, she felt strange and dull; but her duties soon became something more than mere routine, and her interest in all living and breathing around her soon rendered her regret at parting with old friends less acute.

For Ruth Dell was an energetic girl, under whose feet the grass had little chance of growing. In her manner of teach-

ing and governing there was no small copy of her uncle's *régime*, unsullied with that unceremonious sharpness, which rendered the natural merit of his principles less palatable.

Ruth possessed John Dell's method, energy, and practical good sense, and added thereto a new gentleness, which worked wonders in her teaching. And Ruth's heart being in her task she succeeded well, as was natural and just.

Still those good ladies of the shears and distaff must have been against Ruth Dell's peace of mind to set her down in this quiet retreat, whence was to arise all those troublous incidents which were to affect more futures than her own, and whence was to evolve more than she could guess. It is not in the busiest scene, or amidst the noisiest crowd, that troubles the most great, troubles to cling to us, always arise. Apart from the world, in the silent home of our choosing, may lie hidden the rock whereon we strike and give up.

Her new life—almost the new story—began in this wise. Ruth Dell had not been three weeks at Ansted school when a visitor, in a somewhat unceremonious manner, came rustling into the school-room—a lady visitor of imposing exterior, and proportions verging on colossal, clad in furs, and crapes, and flounces, and carrying her two or three-and-sixty years in a stiff-backed, military manner.

The offspring of the race that had seen its better days rose *en masse* at the appearance of this lady in the school-room, affording sufficient evidence to Ruth that the new comer was a person of importance.

"Pray, don't rise, Miss Dell," said the lady, taking a half movement of Ruth's as an intention of so doing. "I am very charmed to have the pleasure of making your acquaintance."

A pause succeeded this assertion, during which both ladies took stock of each other, after the invariable manner of ladies on similar occasions. Ruth Dell, by a simple glance from her table, comprehended the ample proportions of her visitor, and fancied there was something kind and friendly in the broad smiling face that met her own; and the lady more deliberately surveyed Ruth, and took her time over her critical inspection.

What she saw we will endeavour to describe—for Ruth Dell is one of our chief players, and has not been introduced with that proper amount of formality due to leading characters in general. Sitting there, with her small library-table drawn close to the open window, through which a warm spring air was entering the school-room, Ruth offered a fair opportunity for the lady's observation. Evidently a curious lady, for a gold double eye-glass was settled firmly on her nose, to make

quite sure that nothing escaped her ; and Ruth felt a little uncomfortable under the inspection, though she feigned to be unaware of so deliberate a survey, and continued the hearing of the class that at that moment chanced to be before her desk.

The lady-patroness was pleased with Ruth Dell. She saw before her a young woman of graceful carriage, tall for her age, looking rather grave and earnest for her years, simply and neatly dressed, and with a fair English face, that was pleasant to stand and quietly admire. A pale face, on which thought and even firmness were expressed, shaded by bands of dark chestnut hair, and lit up by two large hazel eyes—worlds of beauty in themselves. No wonder that poor hero of ours had thought of that face too much, and of those deep thoughtful eyes too often—they had been before him since his awakening to a better self—they had encouraged him to fight his way in the world—they had been his incentive to exertion, and had troubled him and been amidst his everyday life a romance and a snare. If they had seemed farther and farther from him every day, he could not shut them from his thoughts, though he might sink them deeper from those who would have been alarmed at his secret.

The lady visitor having concluded her inspection, taken a vacant seat, and gently lowered herself into it, as though doubtful of its capabilities of support, waited patiently for the class to finish its lessons, and swung her eye-glass to and fro by its chain, as though that monotonous occupation relieved her mind a little.

The class dismissed, and the school duties over for that afternoon, the portly dame dashed into conversation with a vigour that showed how trying an ordeal her previous silence had been.

“My dear Miss Dell, you must never mind my calling here at unseasonable hours, and seeing how my school-pets progress—for I’m afflicted with a great deal too much time on my hands. I should have troubled you a fortnight ago, had I been strong enough to exert some of my old energy ; but I have had a great loss, and this is my first effort at anything like change. I don’t bother you?”

“Oh, no !” said Ruth, with a smile.

“I’m afraid I bother a great many people though—even my son, who is glad to run away to his business, and leave me in my great grand house, all alone with the servants ; a good lad in his way, but not a mother’s lad—all for making money and dying rich, I suppose, like his poor father before him. Oh ! dear,”—with a heavy sigh, that went to Ruth’s

heart—"you must not mind me coming here and seeing the children very often—it's so dull at home, Miss Dell, and I'm growing such a nervous old woman now!"

Ruth thought their acquaintance of too short a duration to offer much sympathy, and contented herself with a quiet expression of her pleasure to see the lady whenever she felt disposed to wend her way up the hill. The stout lady brightened at this, and took to Ruth on the instant.

"I'm very much obliged to you, Miss Dell—for I'm fond of children, and it occupies one's mind to come here. One's breath, too," she added—"for it's a terrible walk up that hill, and I don't always like to bring the carriage—it's so very fussy, isn't it? Once I tried the pony-chaise; but I'm afraid my weight was too much for the pony, for it hasn't been well since—and Isaac don't like me walking so much, although it's good for me, and been recommended by the Faculty. You're a very nice young lady," she added, with a suddenness that made Ruth blush and laugh, despite the serious countenance maintained by her visitor. "Oh, but you are," said the lady, "and I've met with such very nasty young ladies in my time, that it's a gratification to come across an antithesis. Disagreeable pert young ladies, like your predecessor, who told everybody I came too often, and upset the children with the messes I brought them—messes she called them!—and interfered with her duties, and actually hinted to my face that I was vexatious and troublesome. I believe she reported me to the Board; but as I subscribe fifty pounds a-year to the Institution, I wasn't suspended."

The lady talked very rapidly, and it was only a shortness of breath, accompanied with a bellows-like noise, that hindered perpetual motion. For ladies are voluble now and then, especially stout ladies—a physiological fact that is worth enquiring into.

"Well, she went away, and married, and serve her right; and now you reign in her stead, and I think I shall like you."

"Thank you."

"I don't go into society much. Isaac—that's my only son—takes me to a dinner-party now and then—fussy work, my dear, and bothers dreadfully. And I like quiet people and young people, and grand doings make my head ache—I wasn't brought up to them. I should like to see my boy more at home in his own house—and, oh! if I only had had a daughter to be a companion to me, what a happy old woman I might have been!"

A strange old woman, this stout lady, thought Ruth—one who, despite her wealth, felt lonely and unhappy, and made

no disguise of it—one whose frankness already won a little upon Ruth, despite that volubility which there was no chance of checking.

"I've often thought of adopting one of these poor children, Miss Dell, for I've money in my own right, and my boy is well off enough without me; but he don't like the idea, and I'm a poor soul, who is easily talked over. And perhaps it's all for the best, as poor Cherbury was so fond of saying."

"Cherbury?" repeated Ruth.

"Yes, my dear—Cherbury, of Ansted, Surrey, and the Iron Works, Lambeth. I dare say you have heard the name?"

"Very often, Madam. My uncle at present is foreman in your son's foundry."

Ruth thought it would be better to inform Mrs. Cherbury of that fact, lest the lady should become too friendly, and feel the avowal at some future period too much of a shock. But Mrs. Cherbury's face only expressed a mild air of surprise, and her fine feelings did not appear to be at all affected by the revelation.

"Dear me, now—that's funny. And I've heard poor Cherbury speak so often of Mr. Dell, one of the best workmen he ever had. And you're his daughter—well, I'm glad to see you rising in life, Miss; and it was very creditable of your uncle to give you a good education. Your father and mother are not living, I suppose?"

"My father is, Mrs. Cherbury. He rents a little cottage about a mile from here—he has recently retired from the police force."

Ruth Dell would have no false ground beneath her feet: lady as she was in all that makes the lady—education, manners, deportment—she would have no mistake concerning her antecedents with one who treated her as an equal.

"And he can't bear to be too far away from his daughter—a worthy old gentleman, I have not the slightest doubt—and proud he must be of you, my dear. Are you very busy just now?"

"Not very busy," replied Ruth, a little doubtfully.

"Then, Miss Dell, I shall take you back to Oaklands, this evening—I want to talk to you about the school, and my little plans, which your predecessor so strongly objected to. There's the carriage outside, and we shall be there in ten minutes."

"Thank you, Madam, but——"

"But, my dear girl, you're not busy, and it must be very dull in this schoolroom, or in your own apartments after the children have gone to bed. And I'm very dull, too, in my

great house since Mr. Cherbury's death, and it would be such a favour!"

Mrs. Cherbury looked so wistfully at Ruth, that Ruth wavered. If she put it as a favour—if her company would relieve her from any lowness of spirits, why, it was a different matter. But it was all very precipitate—they were strangers half-an-hour ago, and the lady was from the higher sphere beyond her own.

"It is so very sudden," she ventured to remark—"and if you could excuse me, I——"

"Ah! but I can't excuse you, for I'm a selfish old lady," she interrupted; "and as we're such near neighbours, we may as well break the ice at once. Why, you and I are both lonely women."

"But your position——"

"Fiddlededee, my dear—fiddlededee!" said Mrs. Cherbury, "don't talk of position—poor Cherbury and I never cared for it, and certainly never took credit for having been lucky in business. Why, bless my soul, that predecessor of yours treated me with such haughtiness, that I was rather nervous in coming to see you, lest you should happen to be of the same pattern. A very high-notioned young lady, who would never come to Oaklands, because we were people in trade, and her father was a gentleman, and a half-pay officer, and had spent his life in earning glory and two wooden legs. Such a fussy young lady, and"—(lowering her voice to a whisper)—fond of beating the poor little dears on the sly. I declare to you, Miss Dell, I have heard such torrents of slaps coming up the hill, that I have fancied the zinc corner of the schoolhouse was loose, and flapping about in the wind. And you will come?"

"If you be quite alone, then?" said Miss Dell, timidly.

"Always alone, my dear! Isaac don't come home for the week together—in fact, he is never at home without something is the matter with him. There, go and put your bonnet on, and I'll wait here till your return."

Ruth Dell did not keep Mrs. Cherbury waiting a great while, and had she been a longer time absent that good lady would have found the wherewithal to amuse herself. For immediately after the departure of the schoolmistress, Mrs. Cherbury had risen from her chair, crossed the room, and opened one of the windows that looked upon the playground.

A well-known friend and a great favourite with the children was Mrs. Cherbury evidently, for they were dancing round her, and leaping up at the sill immediately she made her appearance. They were children who forgot nothing, and re-

membered the pounds of sweetmeats and acidulated drops that had always accompanied her, and given a sweet turn to her visits. And there were their forest of hands stretching upwards, and Mrs. Cherbury shaking from a large blue paper endless comfits and almonds, keeping a wary eye on the schoolroom door meanwhile, lest Ruth should make her appearance too suddenly, and catch her in the act.

"And I hope you like your new schoolmistress, my dears," she said.

And a spontaneous affirmative was uttered with a more hearty good-will than she had heard for a long while.

"And I hope you'll be good girls and learn your lessons, and not worry her too much, and never deceive her—and not say anything about these drops, because I forgot to ask her permission. I'm going to shut the window now—mind your fingers, my dears."

Mrs. Cherbury was in her old seat and looking the picture of innocence when Miss Dell, equipped for departure, entered the room.

In a few minutes they were rattling down the hill away from Ansted schoolhouse, towards a large white mansion standing in its own grounds, and commanding one of the finest views in Surrey.

"You have dined, Miss Dell?" enquired Mrs. Cherbury.

"Some hours since, thank you."

"So have I—late dinners are so fussy. Isaac dines late, but then he belongs to the new school, and has been brought up differently to poor Cherbury and me. A dear lad, though—and God bless every hair of his head!" added this full-hearted mother.





## CHAPTER II.

### THE CHERBURYS OF ANSTED.

**T** was striking six when the carriage drew up before the great Oaklands portico, and one footman let down the steps, and another held wide the door, and the calves of two or three more were observed shimmering in the background of the hall—their owners evidently trying to appear as busy as possible.

“No one has called, I suppose, George?” enquired Mrs. Cherbury of the servant, as she and Ruth passed into the hall.

“Only Mr. Cherbury, Ma’am.”

“Good gracious!—and has he gone again?”

“He is in the drawing-room, Ma’am.”

Ruth Dell felt naturally a little nervous. Her first *entrée* into Oaklands was intended to be a quiet, matter-of-fact proceeding—almost a favour on her part, to relieve Mrs. Cherbury’s monotony; and now Mr. Cherbury had arrived, and confounded both ladies’ arrangements.

Ruth hesitated.

“Don’t look so alarmed, my dear. The most quiet lad you ever met in your life, and one who won’t put you out in the least. Not a bit like young men in general, who *do* rattle on now and then. I’m sure he will be very glad to see you.”

Ruth was not sanguine on this point, and inclined to depreciate herself and her simple gray silk, and more inclined to feel a little in awe of the representative of the great firm wherein her uncle played so subordinate a part. Mrs. Cherbury might be a humble, hearty old lady enough, but what would her son think of the daughter of one of his servants sitting as guest in his country mansion? She wished she had



been firmer, and declined the proffered hospitality of the lady at her side.

But it was too late to withdraw with any grace ; and once aware of the worst, she braced her nerves to meet it, after the fashion of her uncle John.

Five minutes spent in Mrs. Cherbury's dressing-room, and then Ruth, with her hand on the old lady's arm, was entering the drawing-room.

A room on the handsome furnishing of which no money had been spared, and in the ample space of which Mrs. Cherbury's lad seemed lost.

"Why, Isaac, my dear, where are you?" exclaimed the mother, looking round with some little surprise, until Isaac, aroused from a nap by her loud voice, struggled from the depths of an easy chair in the corner, and stood up, looking grim and sleepy.

Isaac dear was a lad of forty-one or two, very tall, very wiry, very stiff in the joints, and very much starched about the collar and cuffs. A man with a certain amount of good looks in him yet, but with a heaviness of brow and a general hardness of aspect that was not pleasant to meet—a man who seemed to have traded in iron, until some portion of that useful metal had become incorporated in his system.

"Isaac, dear, this is Miss Dell, the new schoolmistress of Ansted Institution—Miss Dell, my lad."

The lad bowed with more courtesy than Ruth had expected, and seemed to hesitate for a moment as to whether he should allude to the pleasure of making the schoolmistress's acquaintance ; but being a man of probity and averse to unmeaning compliments, thought better of it, and relapsed into his easy-chair again, and crossed his legs.

"You have not dined, Isaac?"

"I dined in town, Mrs. Cherbury," he answered, in a deep and somewhat grating voice, "and came up by the train immediately afterwards. I'm not well."

"Oh, dear !—not your head again?"

"I've only one complaint, and that *is* my head," he replied. "Glendon says I work and think too hard with it, and recommends a few days' quiet."

"And very kind of him, too," said Mrs. Cherbury ; "I'm sure I'm much obliged to Mr. Glendon. It will be nice to have you at home, Isaac, with a mother to take care of you."

"The quieter I am kept the better, Mrs. Cherbury," said he, drily—"not too much worried about the housekeeping, and the servants, and so on."

"Oh ! dear, no—to be sure not."

"I thought I'd mention it."

And Isaac closed his eyes.

"Perhaps I had better——" began Ruth, when the eyes opened again, and fixed themselves on the speaker.

"Miss Dell will excuse me, I am sure," he said, politely, less harshly, "for my seeming want of courtesy in not playing the part of host on this occasion. I am sure I leave her in good hands."

After which speech he re-composed himself; and Mrs. Cherbury, left to do the honours of the house, acquitted herself to perfection, and talked of the school-life at Ansted, of herself, her lad, and poor Cherbury—of her amateur gardening in the spacious grounds seen from the bay-window at which they sat—and of a hundred other subjects which rose readily to the surface, and left no unpleasant hiatus in the dialogue.

In the window recess Mrs. Cherbury and Ruth had tea together, and the servants glided stealthily in and out, for fear of disturbing the repose of their lord and master in the corner.

Ruth Dell found herself more than once looking towards that corner, and feeling an unaccountable curiosity as to what Mr. Cherbury would do when he waked, and wondering whether he objected to her presence there, and if his head were an excuse for his taciturnity. More than once, too, she fancied that he was not sleeping at all, but watching her from between his half-closed lids; and once she was certain that she saw them quiver and close together more tightly when she glanced suddenly in his direction.

"I wonder whether a cup of tea would do his head good, or he would care to be roused to answer that question?" said Mrs. Cherbury, looking in his direction also. "Perhaps I had better let him be," she added, "as he don't like to be disturbed when his head's bad."

"Does Mr. Cherbury suffer much?" enquired Ruth.

"He complains a great deal at times—you see he has the chief management of a large business now, and he hasn't the head of his father. But he's always quiet and reflective—just as if he had something on his mind, my dear."

The right leg of Mr. Cherbury slipped off his left knee at this juncture, and the foot came to the floor with a heavy stamp, that startled both ladies.

"I beg pardon," Isaac said gravely; "a sudden leap that's all. I wonder you don't have lights—it's cold and dark here."

And Mr. Cherbury went through a perceptible shudder.

"I have rung for them, dear," was the mother's answer.

Mr. Cherbury rang again on his own account, and continued to ring with a quiet pertinacity, that must have been extremely disagreeable in the servants' hall.

"Lights!" he said to the scared domestic who responded to the summons, and lights made their appearance in haste—two wax lights in silver candlesticks for a little side-table, whereon was a desk, and a large ormolu lamp for the centre table.

"Now you're not going to write letters to-night, Isaac!" said the mother, as her son rose and unlocked the desk.

"One or two that are important—if Miss Dell will excuse me."

Miss Dell inclined her head.

"But my dear Isaac—if Mr. Glindon said——"

"If Mr. Glindon said a hundred times I wasn't to write a letter, I should write," he replied, with a dogged obstinacy that told of the iron in his system again, and he commenced writing at the same moment.

He was still engaged at his desk when the hall-bell rung and the hall-door knocker roused the echoes of the establishment, and woke up the stable-dog, who barked defiance to the noise and essayed to break his chain, with the amiable intention of biting the new comer in two.

Mr. Cherbury put his pen back in its tray, folded his arms, and closed his eyes again.

"A terrible noise," he muttered—"a hideous and most unnecessary uproar."

"Who can it be?" exclaimed the excited mother.

"I think it's very likely to be Mr. Glindon," observed Isaac Cherbury.

"Dear, dear me!—why didn't you tell me he was coming?" said the mother, half reproachfully.

"I thought it wasn't of much consequence. It's very dull here without company, and I thought he'd relieve my head a little. You'll do your best to make him feel at home, if I forget anything, Mrs. Cherbury."

Mr. Glindon was announced the instant afterwards, and Ruth fancied the gentleman was not quite a stranger to her. A handsome man in every sense of the word, and with a complexion of white and red seldom seen in a man of a healthy habit of body, possessing a clear-cut, keen-looking face, and a well-shapen, almost massive forehead, from which was brushed back a mass of light wavy hair. A man that people might notice in a crowd and set down for a clever fellow, and be not far out in their judgment.

Mr. Glindon gave a little start upon his introduction to Ruth, and his expression of the pleasure the introduction gave him was muttered in a very hasty manner.

An instant afterwards he was shaking hands with Mr. Cherbury, and enquiring if he felt better that evening.

"A little, I think."

"It's all nervousness, I assure you," said Glindon, "and so I have dropped in to give you a quiet game at cards by way of distraction."

"You're very kind."

"In fact, I've made up my mind to settle in Ansted — become consulting surgeon to Ansted free-school, and work a little practice in the neighbourhood."

"That's a change."

"I like change."

Meanwhile Ruth Dell, who had remained standing, gave a meaning, even an intreating glance towards Mrs. Cherbury. She was new to society, and afraid of it.

"My dear Miss Dell, you are not going?"

"If you will allow me," returned Ruth, in somewhat of a hurried manner; "I am anxious to reach the schoolhouse before nine."

"I fear, Miss Dell, we are frightening you away," said Mr. Glindon, rising; "I hope my presence here is not to deprive Mrs. Cherbury of the pleasure of your company."

"I would rather return, Sir, thank you," answered Ruth.

And there was so much firmness in her manner that Mr. Glindon gave up his persuasive attempts, and Mrs. Cherbury saw there was no hope of a longer stay for that evening.

"I will order the carriage, then, to take you back, my dear," said Mrs. Cherbury; "Isaac, will you touch the bell, please."

"I would prefer walking——" began Ruth, when, to her surprise, Isaac himself interrupted her.

"Your pardon, Miss Dell, but it is really much too late to venture alone to the schoolhouse. The carriage," he added, to the servant who had entered at this moment.

Ruth was secretly annoyed at this determination to send her home in state, though she merely inclined her head and followed Mrs. Cherbury from the room. She would have preferred a walk home up the hill, with the moon rising behind the schoolhouse, and the perfume of the wild flowers meeting her on the way, to the hot close carriage and the parade attached thereto. She could have thought better of all that had happened that night as she quietly wended her way homewards after her own fashion; but it was not to be

and there was the carriage and the pair of grays awaiting her when she and Mrs. Cherbury were in the hall again.

"I wish you had stopped and spent the evening with us, my dear," said Mrs. Cherbury, who was quite concerned at her early departure, "and become better acquainted with my lad and Mr. Glindon. I'm sorry they are here to spoil our first evening together; and rely upon it, Miss Dell, I will manage better next time. And—and I shall give you a call in the morning, my dear, if Isaac don't want too much nursing."

Mrs. Cherbury folded Ruth in her arms in quite a motherly manner, and ran beneath the portico to make sure Ruth was comfortable and the night air was fairly excluded from the carriage, and then parted reluctantly with her new companion.

Returning to the drawing-room she found Isaac and Mr. Glindon with a pack of cards between them.

"You'll not interdict a *quiet* game at cards between Mr. Glindon and me, Mrs. Cherbury," said her son; "it's seldom I can induce him to visit Oaklands."

It was so seldom he could be induced to visit Oaklands himself, his mother thought—although she could but accord her permission to the game, and sit herself down at her work-table, and make preparations to be very busy by producing her glasses, and needlework, and gold thimble. She would have understood her son's emphasis on the adjective had it not been accompanied with a peculiar look that was unfilial to meet with, and which signified an earnest desire to keep down her loquacity. Aware of his mother's weakness, he might have hinted his wishes with a little more grace; but then he was not a man of fine feelings, and perhaps had forgotten how to honour his mother years ago. It's an accomplishment easily lost.

Still Mr. Cherbury was the first to break the silence, as Mr. Glindon shuffled the cards and prepared to deal.

"Have you had the pleasure of Miss Dell's acquaintance for any length of time?" he asked a little abruptly.

Mrs. Cherbury was nearly launching into a full and particular account of their first meeting, and the favourable impression that young lady had made on her, when she encountered her son's glance, and curtailed matters.

"Only from this evening. She is our new schoolmistress at Ansted."

"So you said before. Deal, Glindon."

And Cherbury, more interested in his game than the schoolmistress of Ansted, drew his chair closer to the table, and

with something of a gamester's eagerness proceeded to contest the game with his medical friend.

There ensued a strange stillness in that room, considering the number of its occupants—the servant entering with the decanters a few moments afterwards was quite startling by contrast. When he had retired again, the ticking of the gilt timepiece became the noisiest thing in the room, save and except a heavy breathing, which indicated that the arms of Morpheus were encircling Mrs. Cherbury, whose head had fallen on her ample chest, and whose needlework was trailing on the carpet. The card-players continued silently and cautiously, and took no heed of anything besides their game—and finished money duellists they seemed, in the full blaze of the oil lamp that lighted the field on which they fought.

There was something gloomy and morbid amidst it all—something that would have struck an observer as even strange and sad upon entering the room at that moment. The disregarded mother asleep over her needlework—the tall figure of her son at the card-table fencing cautiously for his money, and Glindon playing with an energetic dash that seemed to last till the stakes were his, when he brushed the shillings to his side, or let them fall to the floor—he was not particular.

It was a room with three grave faces in it, albeit the shadow of the sorrow that had recently fallen on the house was not there at that time.

Presently Mrs. Cherbury awoke with a start, and might have dropped her head over the back of the chair, had she not exerted a counter movement and jerked it suddenly forwards.

"Dear me, I was nearly off to sleep!" said she, rubbing her eyes and yawning; "will you gentlemen have supper now?"

"Presently," said her son, with some little irritation.

"I don't feel much inclined for supper myself, and think I will go to my room. Good-night, my dear lad—good-night, Mr. Glindon."

There was some muttering from the lad that might have represented a response—a more polite good-night from Mr. Glindon, who rose and shook hands with her, and then Mrs. Cherbury went up stairs to her lonely room, and left the gentlemen to themselves.

"Four games to you," said Cherbury, an hour after his mother's departure—"there's no scoring a point against you."

"I always make up my mind to win," he answered; "I came to Ansted to win," he added, with a meaning at which he could only smile himself—for only himself understood it.

Cherbury fidgeted with the cards—he did not care much about cards now he was losing money over it; but still it kept him from thinking of his head, and was better than idle talk at any time. But Mr. Glindon seemed disposed to vary the entertainment by a little conversation.

"May I ask how long you have known Miss Dell, Cherbury?"

"About half-an-hour or so when you arrived."

"Oh, this was her first visit here?"

"Yes, I believe so."

Mr. Glindon sipped his wine—Mr. Cherbury assisted himself to another tumbler of cold water, dashed with just enough sherry to turn acid on the stomach.

"What do you think of her face, Cherbury?" said he; "does it not strike you as a very pure and classic one?"

"I didn't notice it."

"You're not so old either as to shut your eyes to every pretty face that passes by."

"I've my business to attend to," was the quiet rejoinder; "I don't notice anything or anybody out of that much."

Mr. Cherbury rendered this statement a doubtful one a short time afterwards, when Mr. Glindon sat still oblivious to the fact that his adversary faced him with the cards in his hand, ready to deal.

"How long have *you* known Miss Dell?" asked Cherbury.

"I?"

And Glinden was ingenuous enough to colour a little at the question.

"I thought by your manner you had seen her before," observed Cherbury.

The young surgeon laughed.

"Well, you're right," he said; "I have seen her once or twice at a distance—at a training school, where one of the masters was a patient of mine; her face struck me then as a bright intellectual one."

"H'm."

"I know even a fact concerning her that may startle you."

"Nothing startles me."

"You're not a proud man, or I would not tell you."

"Wouldn't you?"

Mr. Cherbury shuffled the cards again and yawned.

"She's the niece of a foreman of yours."

"Indeed!"

"John Dell's the man's name. Do you know him?"

"One of my best hands," was the answer.

"Glad to see you are not shocked at your foreman's daughter taking her place as a friend of your mother's. Cherbury, you're one of the new school and the best."

"Oh, am I?"

"I am a proud man myself, but it's an odd pride that don't look back to a man's father or mother before I make a friend or form an acquaintance. That weakness has been the curse of my parents, and they're as poor as Job, too, and living, for economy's sake, on the Continent. I suppose," he asked, a little anxiously, "Miss Dell will become a frequent visitor at Oaklands?"

"I suppose so. And you also, Glindon?"

"Why?"

"You will be near us—if it's all true about the Ansted appointment."

"Oh, yes—but how long shall I care for the place? There was pleasure in trying for it, because everyone prophesied that there was no chance for me—but as for the place itself, I would resign it to-morrow. Certainly there's Miss Dell," he added, after a pause, "and I'm a ladies' man—I always was."

He looked a trifle conceited as he ran his fingers through his wavy hair, and Mr. Cherbury might have had that idea also. But Mr. Cherbury was anxious to get on with the cards, and make one more effort to regain the shillings lying so carelessly at the elbow of his friend. What did he care about Miss Dell, on whom his medical friend seemed inclined to dilate? What was Miss Dell to him?

She was a matter of no consideration—it was his mother's business, not his, and he had no fine feelings to be wounded by any revelation concerning her origin. He could remember his father no better off than her uncle, but he did not care to prolong the conversation by alluding to the fact. He was no prouder man than his father had been before him, and could see no harm in Miss Dell's visits; and supposing there were, it was not his business, and his mother would alone be answerable. His soul was in the conduct of his own particular pursuits—was hovering over them then, whilst his body was at Oaklands. Apart from the work at which his father had toiled before him, he was only half himself. It had been different once when he was younger, but the wild oats were all sown, and he was a hard-working money-getting man, who watched his chances, and prospered like his sire. This sluggishness and apathy to which we have been a witness was



possibly the reaction from the busy life at Lambeth where he seldom slept, or was nervous, or complained of his head.

"Well, let us have another game," he said, "and drive Miss Dell out of the discussion. I never was a good hand at talk, like my foolish mother up stairs. Deal."

Well for that mother—thinking of, perhaps praying for, the son down stairs—that her heart was not wrung by the hard words which escaped the lips of the first-born. For such words are of the sharpness of the serpent's tooth, and sink deep within those who have children and are striving for them and their love. To some poor mothers there falls the burden of some such ungrateful offspring—there are prizes and there are blanks amongst the children of men, and it is not the one most endowed with the world's goods who is to have the greatest share of the world's happiness.

Glindon had soon forgotten Miss Dell, and was shortly afterwards content with his game and studying hard its intricacies. Mr. Isaac Cherbury continued to lose with great caution and secret annoyance; and Glindon, after a hard struggle, to win with exultation the stakes, which he afterwards carelessly brushed to his side.

Far into the night the lights burned at Oaklands, with the players at the table, and the servants lingering about the down stairs regions, wondering if they should be again required, and how long the young master and his friend intended to sit up.





## CHAPTER IV.

### THE YOUNG GUARDIAN.

**P**ASSING over three weeks of our narrative—although it may be shortly our duty to allude to some incidents that happened therein—we return to him who has given us a title for our history.

It was striking four one summer's afternoon in June when Owen emerged from the Eltingham railway station, four miles from Ansted, and walked sharply down the green lane away from the little town on the right. Owen always walked sharply, after the fashion of energetic people who know what money may be earned in an hour. There was nothing to be gained in this instance, save pleasure perhaps, but pleasure that required to be made the most of by a practical young man who understood the value of time.

Owen marched onwards at a smart pace, then, with his head thrown back and his chest squared like a drill-serjeant's—it was a fair evening's walk, and he enjoyed it and the scenery that lay in his way, and the breeze that met him on the hilly road, as a man accustomed to toil in a London factory can only enjoy God's air and sunshine. He did not pause in his progress to admire this bit of landscape or that brook by the wayside where the ducks were floating and shock-headed village boys angling for fish that never had existence therein : he took it all in at a glance, and passed on at the same steady pace which carried him quickly over a fair stretch of country.

At the foot of one of the Surrey hills he paused for the first time—not to take breath for his ascent, but to watch flying down the hill with a velocity almost too rapid to be safe, a little girl of ten years old. He laughed and waved his Scotch cap to her as she came towards him, and he caught her in

his arms when she was near enough, and held her panting above his head.

"Why, my little Mary, couldn't you wait till I arrived a little nearer home?" he asked.

"Oh, no, Owen—because Mrs. Cutchfield would have had all the talk before I could say a word—and I haven't seen you for so many, many weeks."

"And where's Mrs. Cutchfield, Mary," said Owen, after kissing her and restoring her to the ground.

"You'll see her come over the hill in a minute, out of breath with running after me," said the child, with a musically ringing laugh of her own, "and then you'll hear her begin to scold me, Owen—oh, that's so funny!"

"Indeed!"

"Because she can't scold properly, Owen dear," said the child—"she only makes believe, and isn't angry like my governess when I don't know my letters. Oh, I have such a lot to tell you, gardy—where shall I begin?"

"Wherever you like, Mary," answered Owen, as she danced on at his side; "but do keep still whilst you tell me, or you'll dance yourself to pieces."

"But I am so glad you've come to see me."

"Oh, then dance away if you feel the happier for it," he said, pressing the tiny hand in his, as he looked down at Tarby Chickney's daughter.

A pretty, graceful child, if small for her age, was that daughter of Owen's old friend—a girl all light and life, her cheeks glowing with health, her dark eyes sparkling with pleasure. A fairy-like child, so light and gay was she, the musical voice raised to a high pitch, and the musical laugh rippling off from her red lips at every comment of Owen's. Her excitement and delight were something pleasant to witness, and rendered Owen very proud of the child's affection. Proud of his charge, too, by the way, was our hero—to see her growing up a girl of whom any mother might be proud, was a happy time for Owen. Looking down upon her, he thought of the mother who had been so good to him and died so early, and wished that she had lived to see her little Mary then—to hold her to her breast. He thought of Tarby, too, at that time, and resolved to have a photograph taken of Mary, to remit to Tarby by the next mail—it would be a comfort to that father, who had thought it best to be considered dead to his child.

Little Mary was in the middle of her life and adventures since Owen had last seen her, when Mrs. Cutchfield, struggling with the little breath a long chase had left her, and

striving hard to keep a white mob cap from making off in a retrograde direction, came labouring towards them.

"Oh, you naughty girl, to r-r-r-un awa-ay like that," she gasped; "Lord love her soul, I thought she'd a-gone a-flopping into the brook! She hasn't got a mite of still blood in her body, Mr. Owen—you'll have to give her a good talking to."

Mary looked out of the corners of her eyes at Owen, and her struggle to present a demure appearance under difficulties was too much for our hero's gravity.

"And she's a-laughing now, and I so cross with her."

"But, Mammy Cutchfield, Owen don't come every day."

"Ah, that's true!—there's somethink in that—what a child she is, Sir!"

Owen nodded assent, and the old woman—she was sixty-eight or seventy at least, and carried her years well, or she could never have run down the steep hill after her charge—turned and walked with the guardian and ward.

"And how's the world been treating you, Mrs. Cutchfield?" asked Owen.

"Middling as times go, Sir."

"I hope Mary has been the best of girls?"

"The bestest little girl, Sir—a mite too lively, perhaps, especially when she hears you're coming to see her, and always inclined to make a racket when I want a little peace and quietness with my Bible. But you're a good girl, aint you, Mary?"

"Oh, yes, always!" answered Mary, confidently.

"She shuffles and kicks a mite of shoe leather out—she'll ruin her gardy in shoe leather if she don't keep still a little oftener, and gardy 'ill have to go to the workhouse, and be fed on bread and water."

Mrs. Cutchfield went through a series of pantomimic winks and nods at Owen over the child's head; till Mary, looking straight at Owen, said,

"Is that quite true, gardy?"

"Perhaps rather too dreary a look out," said Owen in reply, "but shoe leather *is* expensive."

"Then I'll sit still till I grow a big woman."

"No, don't do that," said Owen quickly; "now I think of it again, it's not expensive at all—besides, I'm earning a lot of money, Mary. We mustn't check the life in her, Mrs. Cutchfield," he added, turning to the old lady—"it's a sign of health and strength."

"So it be, Sir,—in moderation," she added, with a reserve.

"So don't keep her too quiet—I won't have that," and Owen looked very firm and decisive.

"Lord love her," said Mrs. Cutchfield, prefacing her remarks with a benediction customary to her, "it isn't the likes of an old woman that can keep her quiet, Mr. Owen—it's only now and then, by telling her how cross you'll be, that I can manage her at all. But she's the best of children, for she has a feeling heart, and one can reason with her."

And Mrs. Cutchfield smoothed the disordered black curls of her charge, with an affection touching to witness in so old a woman.

They proceeded to the cottage, standing in its own square of garden ground, and lying a little way back from the road, and sat down to the tea prepared for the young guardian—a simple country tea enough, with brown bread and fresh butter and platefuls of red currants and water-cresses, and other miscellaneous items. Owen was not particularly partial to red currants with his bread and butter, but it was a country custom, and he had become too polite in his manner to enter more than one simple protest against the fruit Mrs. Cutchfield heaped together in his butter-plate.

"We've spent all the afternoon gathering 'em," was the old lady's remark; "the gooseberries are a little back'ard."

"Thank you—currants will do very well. Mary, won't you take any?"

"I'm afraid there won't be enough for you, gardy," replied his ward; "and you've come all the way from London, and must be so hungry."

Owen fancied half a gallon of red currants a trifle too much for him at one sitting, and assured Mary of that fact, who consequently began to participate in the general festivity. After tea, Owen's present, in the shape of a new picture-book, was presented to Mary; and whilst she sat by the lattice window absorbed in the coloured plates, Owen and Mrs. Cutchfield settled their cash transactions for the ensuing quarter.

Presently Owen and Mary were in the garden, Mary showing her guardian her own particular patch of garden ground, where the flowers, bright and radiant as herself, were reared, and Owen becoming thoughtful, and looking at his silver watch.

"It's not late, gardy," said the child, with a scared look into Owen's face. The thought of going away again had driven the colour from her cheeks.

"Ay, but it is late for one who has a long way to go, Mary," said Owen.

"But I haven't shown you my sprig muslin for Sundays—and my new hat that Mrs. Cutchfield trimmed—and you haven't heard how well I can read now."

"Some day when I have a little more time, Mary dear."

"Oh! I sha'n't care to learn any more, if you won't hear how I get on. I'll grow up such a big dunce," and the child pouted her pretty lips, and the tears rose to her eyes.

"Get the lesson-book, Mary, then," said Owen, good-naturedly, "we mustn't stop your learning."

The lesson-book was procured, and Mary, installed on Owen's knee, went through several exhibitions of her spelling and reading powers, under the old honey-suckle porch at the back of the house. But Owen's thoughts were evidently inclined to wander, and his gaze went beyond the book, and across to the distant hills, until Mary aroused him from his reverie by saying—

"You're not listening to me."

"Who says I am not?" asked Owen, aggrieved at the charge.

"Well, I fancied so," said Mary, doubtfully; "but I suppose you know it all without a book."

"Most of it."

"I wonder now, gardy," with a critical glance into Owen's face, "why you want to run away from me so early to-night? You seldom leave here before dark, Owen."

"Ah! but the evenings draw out, Mary."

"Have they drawn out any longer than last summer's, gardy, when you always stayed till Eltingham church struck nine."

"What a memory you have," said Owen, with a little confusion that he tried to hide by a laugh; "and what a deal you want to know for a fledgling. Shall I tell you, I'm not going straight home, then?"

"Oh! dear, where are you going?"

"To see an old friend who lives in the country, at Ansted; the father of the Ruth Dell of whom you have heard me speak so often, Mary."

"Has he any little girls you love better than me?"

"There isn't a little girl I love half so well in the world!"

"Oh, I'm glad of that, Owey," said she, flinging her arms around him; "and I sha'n't mind your going away so much; although I hope Ruth Dell's father won't always live about here, and be taking you away so early. Where's Ruth Dell?"

"She lives at Ansted school now."

"You don't care about seeing her then?"

"She may be at her father's," said Owen, "it wouldn't be proper for a young man to call on a young lady, Mary."

"Why not?"

Owen had entangled himself somewhat in his explanations, and could only reiterate that it wasn't proper, and set Mary on the ground, and rise to his feet.

"Be a good girl till I see you again, Mary—it will not be many weeks, I dare say."

"I should come a little earlier if I were you, to make up for going away so soon."

"A good idea," returned Owen, "I'll think of it. Now run and tell Mrs. Cutchfield that I'm going."

Mary, after an odd little sigh, ran as directed, and the old woman made her appearance, and desired to be remembered to Mr. Dell—to the John Dell, be it understood, who had at first recommended her to Owen.

"It's many a year since I saw John Dell," commented Mrs. Cutchfield, "and I've only heard from him since my old man's death. He was a boy then, with all his troubles before him, though he thought all his troubles had come and upset him. He was a good young man though, and knew where his real comfort lay. And it isn't every young man who turns to a Bible in his distresses—is it, Sir?"

"No," said Owen, wincing a little.

"I'm doing my best to larn Mary to take to it, young as she be. It won't be time thrown away, some day."

"No," answered Owen again; "you're right."

He raised Mary in his arms once more, and kissed her, shook hands with Mrs. Cutchfield, who wished him a pleasant journey back, and then opened the rustic gate separating the garden from the shady lane, and strode away. At the bend of the lane he paused to look back, and found Mary close to his heels, and Mrs. Cutchfield in the rear, struggling with her breath and her mob-cap again."

"I forgot to remind you, gardy, to come earlier next time, to make up!" cried Mary.

"To be sure."

"And you won't go away so early, then—fond as you are of Ruth Dell's father?"

"No—not next time."

"Good-bye, dear gardy, then—and don't forget me."

She was in his arms again, and, as he kissed her, she said,

"At the top of the hill you can see my bed-room window—will you look back there?"

"Certainly."

"Good-bye, then."

At the foot of the hill mentioned by little Mary, Owen looked back to find his ward engaged in an energetic struggle with Mrs. Cutchfield, who objected to a renewed sally in his direction. The old lady had obtained a firm purchase this time ; and though her mob-cap was in the road, and under Mary's feet, she was not inclined to relax her hold and allow Mary to fly off.

Owen laughed and waved his hand, and strode rapidly up the hill, halting again on its summit to keep his promise to his ward. Far beneath him, on the left hand, embosomed amongst the trees that grew each side of the lane he had quitted, a glimpse could be obtained of the thatched roof of the cottage, and the open window in its side, where Mary sat, and waved something white towards him—probably the cap of her custodian, from its size and general appearance. It required good eyes to detect her at that distance ; but the eyes of both guardian and ward had a long range, and Owen responded to the signal, and flung his cap in the air.

"God bless her !" he muttered, as he turned away ; "it is worth the living for, to have that child's love—it is worth the working for. With such a sister to love, and keep from the danger, ought I ever despair ?"

Of what was Owen despairing, as he resumed his way that summer evening, looking so grave and thoughtful ?







## CHAPTER V.

### OPPOSING ELEMENTS.

**T**HREE miles and a half, or four miles, are nothing to a good pair of legs, such as Owen was the fortunate possessor of. He was a rapid walker, and milestone after milestone seemed to fly by him in his progress. True, he exerted himself to the utmost, in his anxiety to make up for lost time—as if lost time were ever regained by discomfort and self-sacrifice!—and paused not for breath or reflection, till the cottage of Robert Dell, familiarly known as 92, appeared on the high-road.

Save for being on the high-road, instead of a shady turning therefrom, it might have been the cottage he had quitted. The same thatched roof, with the window in its side, the same patch of garden ground surrounding the house, and the identical rustic gate hanging by its two defective hinges, which had swung back to his entrance a few hours ago. Owen had visited the cottage before, with John Dell, and had found no difficulty in recognising it—and, considering that he had reached the end of his journey, his face did not brighten a great deal at the prospect.

Was it for the reason that the *ci-devant* 92 was hobbling about his garden, feebly working a Dutch hoe in amongst his cabbages, and fancying he was raking up weeds by the roots, instead of neatly covering them with a surface of mould? For the reason that 92 was alone that summer evening, and he had been hoping otherwise from the moment his mind was made up to take a day's leave.

Well, it was his luck, and he must make the best of it. Dell never showed his disappointment, and was, to a certain extent, his model to copy from. And if he had walked four

miles, and thrown himself into a perspiration only to see a superannuated policeman with gout in both legs, why there was no help for it, and he must salute 92 gracefully.

"A good evening to you, Mr. Dell," cried Owen, from the roadway; and 92 left off raking, and shaded his eyes with his hand.

"Bless me! is that you, Owen Owen?" cried Ruth Dell's father. "Well, I'm uncommon glad to see you, to be sure. Push the gate to the left, and give a hoist, my lad, and step this way."

Owen entered the garden as requested, and 92 looked keenly at him as he advanced.

"Nothing wrong at Kennington?"

"Oh, no."

"Nor at Ansted! you haven't been there, Owen Owen?"

"No. All's well everywhere, I believe," responded our hero, with a short laugh, that was far from natural.

"I don't suppose my nerves are quite so first-rate as they used to be in old penny-patetics times," said 92, after a moment's reflection, "for you gave me quite a turn like."

"I have been to Eltingham, to see a little friend of mine."

"Chickney's daughter?" immediately enquired the old man, who had a good memory still, if even his nerves had deteriorated.

Owen responded in the affirmative.

"And how's she a-growing, Owen Owen?" asked 92; "and who does she take after? Not Tarby, I hope."

"No—not Tarby," replied our hero.

"That's a mortal good job, for Tarby were a rough 'un at times. I shall never forget him to the last day of my life—the rows I had with him. The bad tempers that took hold of him, and made him savage. Is he alive yet?"

"It's doubtful," said Owen, who had his reasons for not being too communicative.

"Got his ticket, I suppose?"

"Long ago."

"Gone into the bush and disappeared—just like 'em all."

Owen hastened to turn the conversation.

"You haven't told me how Ruth is—or whether she likes her change of life."

"She's looking very well, and tells me she's nothing to regret. I saw the dear girl in the beginning of the week."

"Nothing to regret!" Owen did not know, or would not have owned, what there was in the words that jarred upon him. He expressed his happiness to hear so good an account

of her, although he might have felt better pleased had he been told that she could not shake off all the memories connected with the old house, and that they made her dull at times to dwell upon them. To dwell upon them himself, made him dull, and set his heart beating. Was he really of a nature more sensible to outer impressions than she who was so frequently in his thoughts?

"Does she call here *very often*, Mr. Dell?"

"Whenever she can, the dear girl—it's only a mile walk, up to the side of the hill yonder, and down this side; and she wafts over the ground like a zebra."

92 intended to say zephyr, but the flowery parts of his speech were a little inclined to run wild that evening.

"Bless your soul, Owen, it's a bran new unbuttoned life, this here," said 92, reflectively; "retired from active service, and confined to a beat of my own making, and no one to take up—and all pleasant and comfortable. It's beginning life again, to see that girl's face so often here, to hear her voice so often—it isn't like any other voice that I ever heard in my life."

"Or in mine—it's a nice quiet voice, you see," added Owen, fancying that 92 had looked at him with a mild air of surprise.

"It's like an Oligun harp," affirmed 92, with the air of a connoisseur in those instruments; "and so was her mother's, though she didn't live long to enjoy it. And, as I was a-saying, she don't feel herself too proud, or too much of a lady, to keep away from her old father, although I was the first to think that John was bringing her up too grand. Very kind, I thought it, Owen Owen, but a trifle too grand for policeman 92. And John was right, and I was wrong, as was natural enough."

"She's not a vain girl," said Owen.

Next to the pleasure of seeing her, was the pleasure of talking of her to a garrulous old man, who was not likely to have any suspicions; and Owen drew 92 out accordingly.

"As humble as an old shoe, with all her learning; and the lift she's got, as schoolmistress to Ansted," continued the old man. "Why, it was only last week, when she met that young doctor fellow outside here, that she said, 'My father,' with a grace and elegance, that made me feel like a general-ispsebo."

"A young doctor fellow—what, at Ansted?" said Owen, in the coolest manner possible.

"He's the new doctor to the school, and attends to the little one's gripes, and so on—a young chap with a high fore-

head, decentish in his way—and off-handish just a bit—you don't know him?"

"Oh, no," said Owen, "I don't know him. I suppose he don't come here very often."

"Well, he's rather interested in my marrow."

"Why, what's the matter with it?" asked Owen, alarmed.

"My vegetable marrow, I should have said—one I bought on spec, of a gardener down town. It grows like mad, Owen—only look here, now."

Owen bitterly repented his last question, it sent the old gentleman so far on another tack, and brought the history and genealogy of that vegetable-marrow plant to the light, together with a full register of its progress, from the day it became incorporated in 92's list of garden stock.

Owen would have liked to learn a little more detail of that young doctor fellow, who was troubling his mind, and pressing on it and robbing him of his natural tone of voice. He did not know why he should care—it was the height of folly, considering what Ruth was, and all that he had been. Long ago he fancied there had not been a single hope left at the bottom of his heart, and it was natural enough young fellows should be interested in her—more especially "young doctor fellows," who had the happy chance of often seeing her.

"And isn't this Ruth coming down the hill?" asked Owen, with a leaping heart, as the well-known figure of his old friend's niece appeared advancing. He had no doubt upon the subject, although he would have given all that he was worth in the world to be told it was not she at that time. For she was not alone, and sauntering by her side was a young man whose face did not appear quite strange to Owen.

"Yes, and the young doctor fellow too."

"Is his name Glindon?" asked Owen, as the remembrance of their last interview flashed upon him.

"To be sure, Glindon's the name."

Owen watched them narrowly, as they came down the hill together. Every gesture of Mr. Glindon's, every movement of Ruth's, was accurately marked by the keen black eyes observing them. And though there was little to observe, though the conversation was evidently commonplace and far from animated, Owen felt his hand tremble as it rested on the fence. The man looked at her too often, his jealous fancy whispered, and she looked down too much, or away from him, or anywhere save at him, with that old frank look he knew so well;—so be it, was it his right to cavil or demur?

Slowly down the hill came Glindon and Ruth, Owen's

heart sinking at their near approach. They were face to face with him at last, and Ruth, with a bright smile, held forth both her hands to him.

"What, Owen!—oh, how glad I am to see you!"

"I thought I might have a chance of meeting you at your father's before I went back to town to-night," said Owen, letting the little secret reason of his presence there escape him.

"Thank you, Owen, for taking all this trouble. And my uncle, you haven't told me how he is."

"Quite well; and sends his love, of course."

Owen took it for granted he might deliver that message on John Dell's part, notwithstanding John Dell at that present moment imagined Owen to be with Mrs. Cutchfield and his ward.

"Dear uncle—he never forgets me."

"Is it likely?"

Owen delivered this compliment in his usual straightforward manner, not intending it as a compliment, but uttering it, as a matter of course, that all the world might listen to if it liked. From any one else, the remark might have brought the colour to her cheek: but Ruth, who understood Owen so well, only smiled, and betrayed no embarrassment. It was "the young doctor fellow" on whom the remark grated, and whose eyebrows knit in consequence; but Owen was not heeding him—had, even in the first moments of meeting with Ruth, quite forgotten him.

It was time to remember, when he who had been surveying Owen for some minutes said—

"Surely, Miss Dell, I have met this gentleman before."

"Indeed!" was the reply. "He is an old friend of my father's and mine—Mr. Owen—Mr. Glindon," added Ruth, by way of introduction, as she passed along the path towards her father.

"Am I not right in my surmise, Mr. Owen?" enquired Mr. Glindon.

"Possibly;" and Owen looked at his interlocutor and flinched not.

"Once or twice, I think, I had the pleasure of meeting you—you were a boy then."

"You are quite right," was Owen's short answer.

Owen objected to the tone of the speaker; the look on his face was half supercilious, he fancied—but then he was full of fancies!

"On both occasions, I think, we had a trifling dispute—I forget the subject."

"You required more court paid to you than I had time or inclination for—that's it."

"Possibly," was the airy reply. "It has not dwelt upon my memory, or disturbed me in the least."

"I wanted you to attend a dying mother of mine, and you refused."

"Want of time," said Glindon. "Ah, yes—I begin to remember."

"And want of inclination—my mother was a poor woman, and you were afraid of lavishing your services at a discount."

"I don't understand you, Sir."

"I have no more lucid meaning ;" and Owen was turning away, when Mr. Glindon touched him on the arm.

"You are as abrupt as ever, and forget yourself, Sir. You bring yourself forcibly to my remembrance now—you were rude and ill-mannered."

Mr. Glindon spoke with some warmth, for he had lost his temper, and was a man of spirit. In his opinion Owen had treated him rudely, and dashed at his own cavalier manner with a savage ferocity. He had wielded a light flashing rapier, and this rude fellow had struck at it with a bludgeon.

"Possibly, I was excited, and you were coolly contemptuous," replied Owen.

"I must beg to dissent from your verdict."

"Well, there was an opposing element in your nature, or mine—or in both."

"Do you think it exists still?" asked Mr. Glindon, with a curling lip.

"Very likely," answered Owen ; "there are some natures that are better apart, perhaps—whose total dissimilarity must jar when they meet. You will excuse me, but I have a habit of speaking out."

"So I see."

Mr. Glindon, who objected to such plain speaking, raised his head haughtily, and passed on towards Ruth and her father, stood and conversed a few minutes with them, retraced his steps, passed Owen without a glance in his direction, and went out at the gate, and along the road he had recently traversed with the schoolmistress.

Owen, before joining father and daughter, watched him as he wended his way up the hill. It was the dusk of evening, now, with the broad moon rising and silvering the landscape. A dark spot on the white country road seemed the receding figure of Mr. Glindon—as dark a spot on Owen's life would be the man, if fate should bring them more together. Thrice had they met and **exchanged** words that grated on the re-

membrance ; thrice had Owen felt that opposing element within him, of which he had spoken in that brief colloquy, and which might belong to dream-land, so untrue and unrealistic seemed it. And yet the dark spot went on along the road, and Owen watched, and felt his hands clench.

“ If he cross Ruth’s path too often—God help me—and her, perhaps,” he added, after a pause.



# BOOK IV.

DISCORDIA.





## CHAPTER I.

### WHAT OWEN EXPECTED.

**Q**WEN was so far from a hero, that he never allowed his love troubles to float uppermost. His co-mates and brothers in desk-work would have found it difficult to believe in any change ; he was a hard worker, who in business hours sought to discharge faithfully those duties for which the house of Cherbury paid him. He might have been a trifle more grave over his account-books ; smiled with a little more effort at the few practical jokes of his companions, which a sharp head-clerk's absence occasionally allowed ; but his calculations were ever exact, and he did an excellent day's work, even when his heart was smarting under his first disappointment.

Yes, it was a disappointment, after all—one of the greatest and the most acute, because Owen would not confess to himself that he had ever had a right to think of Ruth Dell. Therefore his morbid feelings, and a sense of having lost his chance of the greatest, brightest reward that his hopes could look forward to and long for, were all unwarrantable. His duty was to check those feelings ; he would be a very child to show them to the light, and let the few friends whom he owned be witness to such foolish weakness. He was a man and would live down all disappointment ; his should be a heart for ever hard to guess at !

That he had dreamed and awakened from a fancy picture, was the fate of more than him ; others had suffered and grown strong, and what others had had the power to do, he felt would not fail him at his need. She had never known, and she would never know, what idol he had raised in the inner temple, for a secret worship known but to himself ; if the temple were a ruin, still he had betrayed nothing. There

was even a morbid satisfaction in believing things had progressed much further than they had ; that Mr. Glindon and Ruth were on the eve of an engagement, and every day might bring the tidings home to him. From the fragments he had gathered at Ruth's father's cottage, from Glindon's manner on that evening, detailed in our last chapter, he had framed her story, and, though it clouded the landscape, he believed in it. It was a wild romance, and he had been a visionary ; he, whose duties in a working world should have taught him better. So to the ledger and day-book, and away with the fancies of youth from that day forth. Such fancies had perplexed him, and, to win in the hard race before him, one should be cool, collected, of business and money-getting habits.

Time went quietly along some nine or twelve months after this, and Owen saw but little of Ruth Dell. He avoided Ansted, and never curtailed his visits to his little ward, in order that he might find time to cross the fields in search of one who had held the first place in his heart, from an age that he would have blushed to confess. Once or twice there was no escaping Ruth ; at her uncle's house, principally in the holidays, she took her place in the straight monotonous path he was pursuing, and was kind and gentle, and ever the same to him ; but he was growing older, stronger every day, and his was a nature that could subdue itself. His was a nature, too, that could quickly harden, that a firm mind would force to harden, as a cure for a romantic disease which had been a trouble to him ; and yet, possibly at this particular period of which we write, Owen was more unsettled, if practical and cold, than at any other time before or since.

It did not lighten his thoughts to hear no news of an engagement ; he knew Mr. Glindon was consulting surgeon at the great Ansted school, that Glindon and Ruth must meet frequently, that the man at least was in love with her—he was sure of that !—and that all would follow in due course ; and if a little later than Owen had at first imagined—what mattered it ?

Did it matter either that John Dell had seen Mr. Glindon, and thought him a shrewd, intelligent fellow, who would succeed in the world—that once during the last Midsummer holidays Glindon had called at Kennington, and exchanged with Owen the coldest of civilities ? It mattered nothing to him—nothing ailed or affected him, he assured John Dell one day, when that old friend thought he was looking pale, and told him so.

“Is there much to trouble your mind at present, young

fellow?" said Dell, with that rough precipitancy of speech which took away all idea of his feeling much interest in the reply. And yet John Dell, at that time, was regarding him somewhat wistfully.

"Nothing."

" 'Stick to your business,' is a good motto ; but there is a sticking too close to one idea, one task—till the whole thing becomes a trifle too heavy."

"Do you think so?"

"I know so," affirmed Dell, positively.

"My business is not a trifle too heavy for me, Mr. Dell—I am growing stronger and more confident every day under it."

"You want change."

Owen shook his head.

"You have taken no holidays this year—save an hour now and then, to see that ward of yours."

"It don't strike me that you admire much change yourself, Mr. Dell," said Owen, with a laugh. "Practice, not precept, for me."

"If you'll follow my example, I'll take a week to-morrow," said Dell, sharply, and his eyes protruded horribly with the suggestion.

"I've nowhere to go."

"My brother's cottage, near Ansted."

Owen winced.

"Or the sea side—Margate if you like, along with the cockney tribe, at which so many fine people sneer. A good pickling in the sea would do you a world of good."

"I was never better in my life."

"*That's a lie!*"

Owen coloured to the roots of his closely cropped hair. The lie direct was unpleasant and unpalatable ; and John Dell, albeit the best of men in Owen's opinion, rendered objectionable remarks still more galling, by the crude, biting way in which they were delivered. Never had a man less of fine feelings, or a regard for them in others, than Dell. He wielded his tongue, as he wielded at times his hammer, and it fell very often with a *clang*, and jarred horribly.

"Think it what you like, Sir."

They were facing each other at the open parlour window, that looked into the little back garden ; Dell in his work-of-day suit, with his arm on the window sill, enjoying his after-supper pipe. Ruth had returned to Ansted only yesterday, and perhaps her absence was testing her uncle's temper again. Or was it nearer the truth to surmise that her uncle

was trying Owen—seeking in his own way, after his own manner, to probe to the depths all that had kept the youth facing him so dull and grave lately.

"Well, I'll think it a lie," he said coolly, "because I have known you less dull in my experience, and to assert to the contrary is to try and deceive me. And I won't be deceived," he said, brusquely.

Owen felt uneasy. Dell was a plain speaker and might ask an uncomfortable question at any moment.

"Perhaps I haven't a right to press you so hard, Owen," and his hand smote our hero on the shoulder; "but you are like a son of mine now; and if there's any trouble under that waistcoat, why, I should like to share it with you, or chase it away. And it was a plaguey lie to say you were never better to me—me, a man conceited enough in his knowledge of human nature for fifty. Why, Owen, everything's at sixes and sevens."

"Where?"

"In that morbid anatomy of yours, to be sure. You're not so sharp as you were—more like a worn-out old mill-horse than anything else. You don't persevere—you drag on."

"I stick to my work, you own that."

"Yes, but with as much outward interest as the anemone has in the slimy rock it holds fast to," said Dell—"your heart's gone."

"Eh?"

And Owen coloured once more, and looked indignantly at his lecturer.

"The man with no heart in his work is a machine—and a fool."

"A machine, granted—why a fool?"

"A fool to remain at a task he will never excel in," cried Dell. "Did a machine ever get on in the world, I wonder?"

"You are severe on me to-night, Mr. Dell."

"I want to rouse you," said Dell, less vigorously; "you have changed for the worse, and I must cry stop, if I fail in turning you. Why, Owen, I never see you open a Bible now—and you did once pretty regularly for a youth. And—and I don't find you at my elbow at church now. It was only a habit of yours, Owen—I knew that—but it was a good one and might have led to more good."

Dell looked earnestly, almost reproachfully, at him, and Owen's heart was touched. A new stubbornness, of which he had been unaware himself, melted for a moment, and in that moment there hovered on his lips all his trouble. But a momentary impulse, and then the secret dropped like a dead

weight to the bottom of his heart again, where it lay cold and heavy. Dell was a man who would have heard all, and offered no sympathy, thought Owen; let him keep his own counsel, and be wise. He could but remember one to whom that secret, at such a moment, might have been told, and she had been a mother to him in a time of tribulation, and worked all that good in him for which he thanked her often yet, never his God. And she was dead, and there would be never a woman, mother or wife, to take her place and offer her faithful bosom as a pillow to his heated brain. He wondered, in that bitter moment, whether he would not have been a happier man had he drifted away on the dark waters from the midst of which she saved him.

Perhaps it was sixteen or seventeen months before the crisis came which Owen had expected. In that time the reader may think Owen should have struck for himself, and perhaps given a turn to his love affair. But Owen was a shrewd young man, and seldom precipitate; he had guessed there was no love to be aroused for him in the heart of Ruth Dell, and he shrank from meeting mortification and vexation of spirit. She was a sister, and had faith in him yet; let them keep their old friendly relations, from which a word of his would affright her for ever. In the face of a hope he might have dashed forward; with the consciousness that one was in advance of him, and must win, he hung back like a sensible man.

"Look here," said Dell one evening when Owen entered the house, "here's a long letter that may surprise you."

"From whom?"

"Glendon, the doctor."

Owen felt inclined to drop the letter, or tear it in a hundred pieces, the opposing element of which he had spoken throbbed so powerfully within him. However, he mastered himself sufficiently to pass quickly the letter across the table to Dell.

"I'm a bad hand at reading long letters. Will you tell me the substance of it?"

"Can't you guess?"

Owen met the protuberant eyes. It was a subject he must learn to face, and he made the effort to confront it then.

"It concerns Ruth?"

"Ay."

"It asks your consent to an engagement?"

"Spoken like an oracle, Owen of ours."

Owen dived to the depths of his pocket, and brought forth a cigar-case, that was new to John Dell.

"Where did you get that *thing*?" Dell asked, disparagingly.

"Bought it," was the quiet response.

"So you've taken to smoking, after all. It's a bad habit."

"It's soothing, I have heard you say."

"Ay, and expensive. And it's not every man that can content himself with one pipe or a cigar a day, like me. What do you want soothing for?"

"Oh, everybody smokes now," said Owen, evasively.

"I hate to hear a man quote everybody as a precedent. Everybody is a snare and a temptation."

"But——"

"But, Owen, what makes you dart away from a subject that should be as interesting to you as to me? Don't you care for Ruth's future?"

"As a sister's."

"Then sit down, and quietly talk the matter over with me. You like a brother, I like an old father, to whom trouble has come."

"A trouble!"—and Owen looked anxiously toward him.

A trouble to John Dell as well as to him—it was strange.

"You shall give me your advice, Owen," said he; "though I sha'n't take it, because I never cared for any one's advice but my own."

"Then I'll save my breath, Mr. Dell."

"No, don't do that."

"I have no advice to offer—I have no right."

"Dash it!—I give you the right, don't I?"

John Dell lumped into a seat, and began nervously beating the table with the letter of Arthur Glindon's. He was put out that evening, and made no attempt to conceal it.

"Sit down, sit down, Owen, and don't hang about like a great gawky," he said; and Owen sat down accordingly, and, altering his mind about smoking that evening, placed his cigar case on the table, where it lay between him and John Dell, with an enamelled Messalina-like head, in showy relief against the dark-green morocco. John Dell surveyed this head once or twice, and fidgeted and twitched angrily his right gray whisker, as though it put him out.

"Subject number one uppermost, and to be carefully filed before subject number two is laid before us," said Dell. "Subject number one, now?"

He had pinned Owen to it, and Owen braced his nerves and kept no longer his dark eyes downwards.

"I'll read you the letter," continued Dell, "and if you've no advice to offer, why you can leave it alone. He's a bit of

a blunderer, for he dashes off without a date, like a silly woman, and writes downhill anyhow, like a wretched author I knew once."

It was a well written courteous letter, at which no one, however prejudiced, could find fault. It was an earnest letter, too, and Owen felt it was not a false pretence of earnestness. A false letter always betrays itself, and mock sentiment on paper has a mark of its own which there is no mistaking. This letter was not what Owen expected; he had no admiration for Mr. Glindon, but he felt that Mr. Glindon wrote well, and meant what he wrote; and that possibly he had painted that gentleman in darker colours than he deserved. At all events the man loved Ruth Dell, and though Owen bore him no esteem for that, on the contrary, hated him with a new intensity for which he could not account, he could but say at the conclusion, "A fair statement."

"Well, it's fair enough, as you say," assented John Dell; "it states his case, his love for Ruth, his opinion that Ruth loves him; it tells us that he has seen her father, whose opinion is worth about as much as his caterpillar-eaten cabbage he bores one to death about," added John Dell very unfraternally, "and he winds up by asking for my consent in a polite and gentlemanly manner, and yet I don't like it."

"You have expected it?"

"Ay, partly, partly—I don't walk through the world with my eyes shut."

He walked through the world with his eyes very much out of his head, and perhaps saw more than other people. Owen even doubted at times whether he had not seen through him—a matter of no difficulty—though Owen fancied his flimsy rags of disguise were triple-clad steel, which no suspicion could pierce.

"And it's a good match."

"Ah! I don't see so much as that," said Dell quickly; "the man being a surgeon, and of a good family, don't square it. It's a good match for him, lad."

"True."

"It's a good match for any man who can win a virtuous religious girl to himself; if he be a right-minded man, he will think it the greatest blessing that can ever befall him on God's earth."

John Dell's hand smote the table heavily, and scared Owen's reverie to the outermost verge. He had never seen his friend so excited.

"I'm an old bachelor, Owen," he said more softly, as he met Owen's surprised look, "but I think so all the same."

Had I come across such a girl, I would have tried to marry her years ago, and I would have been a better man. I might have had then a daughter to give away of my own, instead of this *sham* !”

“Ruth is like your daughter—there is no sham in it. She would not marry him, if you were to say ‘he is unfit for you—I object.’”

“God bless her, she’s a good girl. And I think, Owen, you’ve gone pretty near the truth, for an addle-headed lad.”

“Thank you for the compliment.”

“And you have *been* addling yourself lately, and been a trouble to me, boy. I suppose she was at the bottom of it—eh?”

His great hard hand—and yet his kind fatherly hand—passed quickly over the table and pressed Owen’s arm, curbing the convulsive start which would have taken our hero from the room. It was a time to talk of it, and John Dell had seized the right time, like a cautious man as he was.

“Sit still, Owen, for a moment or two, I won’t bore you. I’ve kept it back a long while, knowing no good could follow it, but it may as well come out, now all’s over and ended. I’ve seen it all along, and wished it—but it wasn’t to be.”

“Wished it—oh, Sir !”

“You were more in her sphere—you were steady and persevering, and likely to get on. You would have made her a good husband in time, and she would have led your heart aright, and made a Christian of you—which you aren’t—and, oh ! Owen, which you may never be.”

“And you knew it, and didn’t think her too good for me—me, a waif from the streets !” he cried passionately.

“Don’t bellow out like that—there’s half-a-dozen boys trying to swing my front gate off its hinges, and they’ll hear you. What a place this Kennington Road is for boys !”

And as though interested in so momentous a question, he withdrew his hand from Owen’s arm, and sat and reflected upon the subject, giving time for Owen to subside again into himself.

“I dare say after to-night you and I will never talk of this again,” Dell resumed, in a manner very strange and gentle for him ; “it’s a subject far from palatable, and had better die out in its own way. What I wished did not come to pass—it was God’s wish, too, and so for the best.”

“You have never given Ruth to believe that I—I——”

“No,” broke in Dell, “that would have been unfair to you, and distressed her. I should not have spoken of it, only these kinds of disappointments change a man, and rob him



sometimes of his best motives for exertion. *You're changed.*"

It was the old sharp manner, and Owen felt glad of it. The new manner had pained and moved him, and the tears had been in his eyes more than once.

"Ruth will go away and have a home of her own some day," said he, "and then there's only you to look after—a rough young cub, that will be more trouble than half-a-dozen girls. You *are* changed, you know."

"You have told me so before, I—I am sorry if you think I have changed for the worse."

"I know you have," said Dell, "for you're unsettled and restless. Those young clerks don't do you any good—dash 'em!"

"They do me no harm, I think."

"It's very odd that a parcel of young men together must talk obscenity, and think it fine talking, and so manlike," said Dell; "it's very awful to think of the evil thoughts that slide in under cover of a jest—of the evil deeds that follow the thoughts, just as the evil seed follows the rank weed that has flowered amongst the corn. Just as—well, I won't preach."

It was John Dell's weakness, that horror of preaching. His honest nature detested cant, and he was not bold enough to be thought a canting hypocrite himself. He felt he could have done more good in his time by striking at the right moment, in the right mood, but he had left it for others less practical than himself. He would have been laughed at by those whose opinion he already thought valueless, and he had been only moved here and there, as by an impulse direct from the God whose servant he was. He was a timid man, for all his abruptness, and would not venture into the deep waters, even to save those who might be sinking down. For they sank so slowly they might be only drifting with the stream, and there were a hundred better hands than his upon the banks to offer help and strength. It was not his profession to be continually alive to the weakness and wickedness of all passing around him. So there are men who preach too little as well as too much—who let the right time go by as well as the wrong; and so the balance in both cases swings heavily to the dark side. Perhaps there may come a time when even saving sinners may be fashionable. Grand people have started a great many out-of-the-way things in their day!

In the present instance John Dell, despite his assertion, had not quite done with our hero; he saw a chance of turning him from that abnormal state of misanthropy which Colin,

who has been disappointed in Colinet, has taken to from the days of Arcadia.

"I won't preach," reiterated Dell, "but I won't wind up without again hinting that it will be the better for you to turn back to your old self. You are sliding away from it, and making for the easy, devil-may-care, fast school."

"And yet I study too hard, and don't take enough holidays?" said Owen.

"Exactly; and so there will be a reaction and a grand plunge," said Dell; "and all my hopes of seeing you a bright man will go down with you like so much lead round your neck."

Dell became excited again, and caught up Owen's cigar-case, and shivered to pieces the china medallion, with which it was ornamented, against the corner of the table.

"There, I meant to do that!" he said, pitching the case to Owen—"I hate your brazen-faced portraits of hussies who ought to have known better than sit for them; and what pleasure you or any man can take in such wretched rubbish is a puzzle to me."

"It was the quietest I could pick out of the batch."

"I'd have flung the lot at the owner's head, then," said Dell.

Owen smiled at his friend's impetuosity, and Dell took it as a good omen that the first acute pangs were recovered from. Still, parting from Owen that night, he could not forbear shaking hands with him, and looking him steadily in the face again.

"I mustn't have you change," he said. "I don't take so often to faces, that I should care to see this lined and shadowed, and looking reckless, like so many I meet in the streets. Your disappointment is of thistle-down, and one hearty breath will puff it away!"

"Well, I'll try then."

"Look at me, and say if you think I am a puling, white-faced, lackadaisical prig, who is wasting away or piling up the horrors, because a woman wouldn't take to him."

It was a bold, gray-whiskered, slightly-lined face, without a dash of sentiment in it. Love-troubles might have swept at it once, but they had been dashed off like the spray from an iron-bound coast.

"I don't think you have suffered much from the tender passion, Mr. Dell."

"I have suffered deeply, and kept my cares to myself. What you have felt is a child's fancy; from such a disappointment as mine, may Heaven keep every honest man free!"

The shadow of that disappointment crossed him as he spoke, and it was for a moment a face on which trouble rested and changed. Owen would have dreamed of 92's love-troubles before John Dell's. Dell, to his fancy, had always been hard and abrupt, and unyielding; an unfanciful child, plodding on quietly to an unfanciful manhood. And after all, he had had his heart touched by a fair face, and been crossed in love like other mortals—suffered more than most, or his truthful tongue would not have asserted so much.

Well, Owen would grow stronger—he had no fear of that. His was hardly a love-story, for the love had been all of one side, and could therefore be more easily lopped away.

Still, he was uneasy and unhappy. For his love was a pure, unselfish passion, and he had a fear that he had not owned to his companion that Ruth had chosen, or was about to choose, unwisely. He had seen but little of Glindon, but all that he had seen was distasteful, and seemed to tinge his character unfavourably.

And the shadow of such thoughts kept him wakeful at his open window, long after John Dell in the next room had dropped quietly to sleep.





## CHAPTER II.

ARTHUR GLINDON.

**J**OHN DELL went alone to Ansted the following evening, and saw his niece Ruth. It was a long interview, with which we do not intend to trouble the reader, and it ended satisfactorily, and with a few tears on the lady's side—natural to such interviews in general. With that frankness she had inherited from him, she let her uncle see that Mr. Glindon had made some progress in her affections, and John Dell could but give his assent to the engagement, and add thereto as hearty a blessing upon it as though she had been his own child. He wrote to Glindon after his return, and that gentleman called upon him at Kennington, and entered into a statement of his prospects, his family matters, and his parents; all of which we also refrain from troubling the reader with. His prospects in life will be alluded to in due course, and the parents will not make their appearance, being abroad, and intending to stay there. Suffice it to say, that Glindon's statement was satisfactory to John Dell; and revert we a little to that course of events which made lovers of the young doctor and the school-mistress.

In the first place, it had not been an easy conquest of Arthur Glindon's—Ruth Dell belonging to that staid, thoughtful class of young women, growing every day so unbeautifully less. Ruth Dell had not given much thought to the morrow or the men; whether she should be married, and who would fall in love with her, and take her to be his wedded wife. She had been brought up quietly, and passed on her way to womanhood without having her senses distracted by what homely people call "a parcel of chaps." Undeniably a pretty girl, she had not made good looks her study, or sought to trade in

them and raise a sensation with them, as young ladies of a faster order of creation do now and then. The sterner sex had not perplexed her before Glindon's appearance on the scene ; she had not dressed for them, or talked at them, or invited them to her side by glances meant to be shy, or broad stares indisputably bold ; she had not flirted and simpered, and ogled and angled, and been so prettily-fast as is—alas !—the fashion in the sad new times wherein husbands are scarce. The sad new times wherein such manners, fashionable though they be, are scaring true lovers away, and bringing the false and vapid to nothing but empty compliments—the trying greivous times for mothers of families whose daughters are on their hands still, and whose sons are going dead against God's laws and calling it life. And when sin is looked at as a jest, and sinners are but free-livers and “horsebreakers,” society is undergoing a change which is bad for it, and against which every man that thinks and feels honestly ought to protest.

Possibly because Ruth Dell was the reverse of the fashion, and made no “eyes,” Arthur Glindon thought it necessary to fall in love with her. He had fallen in love with her before she was schoolmistress at Ansted, and whilst she was yet unaware that such a person as Mr. Glindon existed. He had seen her at the training-school, whither business had called him, heard of her acquirements, and been interested in her. Fortune had not been favourable in his case, and he had only found the opportunity of making her acquaintance just at the time that she escaped him and went to Ansted. His was a nature that struggled to subdue opposition, and took not prudence into consideration when led on to attain any object that tempted him. There was interest in the chase then, and fortune becoming more kind, rewarded his perseverance by making a vacancy for consulting surgeon at Ansted. Having obtained, by more than common energy, the appointment, he began to think perhaps it would not be prudent to fall in love too deeply with Ruth Dell. It was only an infatuation—he had been subject to such—and it would die out in good time.

He was a rising man, and she was a schoolmistress ; her family was objectionable, while his was a highly-respectable family, if a little poor in its way. In the second instance he had found it hard not to fall in love, and in the third he had begun to despair if Ruth would ever fall in love with him, and so gone slap-dash into the stream and struck out for her with all his energy. And he had won her, after a long struggle, after more patience than he had believed himself possessed of,

and more perseverance than he had ever bestowed on his profession. Naturally clever, he had worked his way easily upwards—had much application been necessary, he would have still been an assistant at a parish doctor's. He was astonished to find what a difference his love chase had made in him—how many extravagant habits he had laid aside for the nonce—what a many fast friends he had omitted to call upon—how the time had slipped away in going to and from Ansted, to his patients lying beyond the free school on the hill.

Not that he attended to his patients quite so regularly as he might have done ; albeit if his love-matters had not lured him away, other incentives to pleasure would have caused him to wander. Glindon was not of the settling-down, stay-at-home order ; if it had not been for one or two of those lucky cases which make a medical man, he would never have had much connection to attend to. He was naturally impatient and irritable—add thereto that he was vain, and the reader knows almost as much of his character as we intend him to know in this chapter. The reader has met with him before, and is aware of one or two bad habits of his ; how they will affect his history, and the tenor of more lives than his, future pages must decide.

It may be a matter of surprise that Ruth Dell should have taken to Arthur Glindon, but there are strange inconsistencies in the universal passion, and Ruth knew less of the real Arthur Glindon than the reader knows. She had seen and met often an accomplished young man, who was neither frivolous nor affected, and when business brought them not together at Ansted school, there was good Mrs. Cherbury to manœuvre without her knowledge at Oaklands. For that estimable lady was of the good old order of matchmakers, and having taken a fancy to Ruth Dell, would have moved heaven and earth, had it been in her power, to find her a fitting husband. Her first idea had been to reserve Ruth for her "dear lad Isaac," but that was a sanguine dream, in which both Isaac and Ruth "fought shy." Isaac was forty-three, and seemed dead to temptation, and Ruth would have preferred a nunnery to accepting him, had the choice lain between the two. Finally Mrs. Cherbury took Mr. Glindon in hand, and nearly made his case hopeless by her interference, and by her clumsy manner of arranging meetings intended to appear chance ones ; but the end made good the means, and now Ruth Dell was engaged to Mr. Glindon, and was to marry him after a year's probation.

"And the Glindons are a very nice family, my dear," said

Mrs. Cherbury ; "a little fussy, perhaps—but that was their way when they were in England. And we all have a way with us ; and though they thought nothing of my poor Cherbury because his blood wasn't good and theirs was—not that I saw any difference, unless it made Cherbury more of a purple shade, as if his waistcoat was tight—yet they'll think a great deal of you for all that."

Some remarks of this kind led Ruth to enquire of Mr. Glindon whether he had communicated with his parents respecting their engagement ? Yes, he had written, as a matter of course—and the reply, as a matter of course, would be favourable ; but was not he old enough to be his own master ? His parents did not expect him to marry an heiress—in fact, never troubled themselves about him, and were simply poor gentlefolk, living abroad for economy's sake. He was the best judge, and knew who would make him the best wife.

And Ruth blushed, and evaded his looks, and felt very happy under the circumstances. And she *was* very happy, with life at that time in its spring, and no clouds threatening. He was her first love, and the one hero of her life. Before that time she had had ever a reputation for firmness and self-control, but she was always strangely confused now, and business matters appeared dwarfed in importance, after John Dell's consent had been added to that of her father's. Owen saw more of Arthur Glindon after the engagement—strove, for Ruth's sake and her uncle's, to be as pleasant and agreeable to the young surgeon, as the young surgeon strove on his own part. But there certainly *was* an opposing element at work, which kept them a long way apart in their hearts from each other. There were little spars of words between them when they were left together for a moment, playful satirical little thrusts at each other in arguments on passing events, that were trying to both tempers.

"He would insult me, if he dare," thought Glindon ; and "he would do me an injury, if it were in his power," was the inward conjecture of Owen. Both remembered too well that night of the renewal of their acquaintance, when both spoke a little too plainly and warmly. Its shadow was ever between any reciprocity of feeling between them. Owen regarded Glindon as a man who had won a prize for which he had been secretly striving, and as a man also with whom that prize could not be trusted ; and Glindon took no more readily to Owen, for his belief that they had been rivals when they met at 92's cottage, near Ansted. And if the truth must be told, Glindon, from his own elevated position, looked down a little on Owen. Owen had been a greengrocer's boy, and was still

only a clerk in a factory. He would not have looked down on him if he had not given himself such airs, perhaps—and Owen did show off a little now and then, for he was human, and had his weaknesses—and he was some years Glindon's junior. It was well Glindon loved Ruth Dell with a strong man's passion, for he was contracting a *mésalliance*, at which many a one in his position would have hesitated. She would grace his home, and make him a lady-like, accomplished wife ; but Heavens ! what a father, uncle, and friend ! If he could shake off the whole of them, and take Ruth to a foreign land, how much better it would be ;—there were fairer opportunities of succeeding in another country. So Arthur Glindon was an unsatisfied being, to whom the glorious unattainable was ever beyond, making him unhappy, because out of his reach. Another phase of his character you see—a strange phase, that renders him a most remarkable and out-of-the-way creature.

Surely not true to human life this Arthur Glindon, cry my readers—dear and valued friends of mine, who, like myself, are always content with the present, and have no cause to grumble at anything. Our business and profits are large enough—our friends are only a little better off—our mothers and sisters-in law, and wife's acquaintances, are all that we can wish—and our poor relations are the slightest of thorns in the plumpest of flesh. We sit composedly under our fig-tree, and have no schemes for advancement, no repinings at the poorness of the prize for which we fought so hard in times past, and no upward glances at the grapes, which seem as distant as heaven.







## CHAPTER III.

### WHAT OWEN DID NOT EXPECT.

**M**R. ISAAC CHERBURY'S head not troubling its owner with its aches sufficiently to detain him from business, he was once more punctual in his attendance at the foundry, wherein his father had made much money for his widow. Isaac, as the reader aware, had been bequeathed the business to make a fortune for himself; and early and late he was at his post in his private room, planning and corresponding enough for half a dozen men at least. He would allow himself no holiday; the unholy fever of money-getting kept him more restless than his father, and rendered him more spare and pinched. If he had been less anxious, he would have been a handsome man; if he had bent less over his desk, he would have been more straight in the back, and some inches broader across the chest.

He had a pride in the business, but it was not the old pride of his father's—he would have worked hard for money in any shape, under any circumstances. We have seen him at the card-table with Glindon, fighting hard for a few shillings before the great library-table, whereon so many papers were heaped, one could scarcely imagine him the same man, although it was the same passion that chained him there. Still, he did not appear one who could betray excitement, or be moved by any loss or gain—he seemed ever cold, calculating, and close. The chill of his presence stole into the counting-house, and made an ice-pit of it; and if he appeared in the workshops, the hammers seemed to ring more faintly, and the furnace burn less fierce.

And yet he was not a proud man, only one who objected to be bothered and have those ideas with which his head was

full disturbed by other people's suggestions. He was taciturn in business hours, and as grim as though he had committed a murder, and was ever haunted by his victim's ghost.

He was a fair master to his men ; he gave them holidays on all legal occasions ; and in matters of dispute it was more comfortable to reason with a man who never answered than with the foreman and overlookers, who bullied so ferociously. But he was not liked much. He kept at a long distance from his servants ; he was a silent man, and, moreover, as will be presently shown, he was a suspicious one.

"Times are altered," and "the young tree is never like the old stock," were the comments expressed when he assumed the sceptre of government ; Mr. Cherbury, senior, was a pleasant, chatty, amiable old gentleman, but his successor was hard to make out, and hid himself too much in the inner sanctum to be a favourite with a thousand and odd workmen who cared not to be estimated as so many slaves or machines.

Owen, among the rest, did not entertain any very great amount of affection for Mr. Cherbury ; had, in fact, but seen very little of that gentleman, and had only received a commission now and then concerning books and papers connected with the business, couched in the briefest terms.

Some two or three months after the engagement between John Dell's niece and Mr. Glindon, when Owen, having taken Dell's words to heart, was more like his old self before love matters troubled him, a turn was given to Owen's life that was unexpected and strange.

Lives flowing on calmly and monotonously do receive these sudden "pulls up" at times ; on the great chess-board, amidst the crowd of lords and ladies, blundering rooks and humble pawns, one must receive a check sometimes—it is the law of life, the natural sequence of mixing with the world.

Owen had many reasons for remembering that "turn" to the last hour of his life : when he was an older man it made him grave to think of it. Mr. Cherbury's head had been a trifle more unmanageable than usual one morning, and Mr. Glindon had been sent for in haste, and spent half an hour with him, passing in and out of the counting-house without acknowledging the existence of a young gentleman whom he was accustomed occasionally to meet in a different sphere. Owen had not troubled himself concerning the slight, if slight it could be called. Possibly Mr. Glindon had feared disturbing him over the ledger, and thought friendly salutations in hours of business a little out of place ; probably he

was "stuck up," and wanted to show off—it did not matter one way or the other to Owen. That particular morning the chief clerk, a little wiry man who had served the Cherburys for fifty years, was sent for, after Mr. Glindon's departure, and remained with the head of the firm half an hour or more. Returning to the counting-house, he addressed our hero direct.

"Mr. Owen, Mr. Cherbury wishes a few minutes' conversation with you."

"With me?" said Owen, scarcely able to realise that fact on the instant.

The head-clerk nodded, and Owen left his high stool and walked briskly towards the master's study. At the door he paused to wonder what Mr. Cherbury could possibly want with him, and had a vague idea that some important topic—such as a rise in salary—was about to ensue. Well, he had been thinking of a rise in salary lately; how agreeable it would be to swell his savings' bank account, which had remained *in statu quò* for some months, now—Mary Chickney's expenses becoming a little more heavy as she grew older. Buoyed up with this pleasant thought—for he had had an unaccountable presentiment before this that something was wrong—Owen knocked at the door, and received from within a summons to enter.

Mr. Cherbury was sitting in an arm-chair by the empty fire-grate, his knees crossed, his silk handkerchief hanging over his head as a protection from flies—his whole appearance suggestive of ease. A position similar to that in which we first met him at Oaklands, and a singular position to find him in his house of business, with the letters unanswered on his desk.

"Shut the door quietly, Mr. Owen," he said, as our hero entered, "and make sure no one's listening outside."

Owen complied with his request and then advanced a few steps into the room, saying,

"I hope you are not unwell, Mr. Cherbury?"

"My head feels too big for me, that's all. It's the only complaint I have," he said, in a petulant manner, as if it were one complaint too many, and rather hard on him.

Owen stood by the library table waiting his master's pleasure.

"Mr. Glindon recommends me to keep quiet till three, so I thought in the interim I would send for you and settle that matter."

"What matter, Sir?"

"Only the matter that has been troubling me the last three

days—a little matter, which it may be as well to settle at once.”

It was very strange, Owen thought, and his active mind went busily to work for a clue to the mystery, and could not wait for the slow explanations of Mr. Isaac Cherbury.

“I only wish you to say No and withdraw,” remarked the employer.

“To say No?” repeated Owen.

“I don’t believe it can be Yes, and—and I’ll take your word to the contrary.”

“Pray, explain, Sir,” said Owen, impatiently.

Mr. Cherbury appeared to have some difficulty in explaining, or having been recommended quietness would not put himself in a hurry. Besides, he had nearly an hour before him, the time-piece in its ebony case on the mantelshelf stood only at a quarter past two.

“Well, then, an absurd statement has reached my ears, Mr. Owen, and I leave it for you to disprove. It can’t be true, and yet it bothers me.”

Owen felt uncomfortably tight about the chest. Relating in after years the story, he said the whole truth flashed upon him at that juncture, and paled his face and took away his breath. The dark past came nearer to him in that instant than it had done for many years. He was a waif in the streets, homeless and friendless, and ignorant only a few days ago!

“Were you ever in prison?”

Mr. Cherbury might have brought the question round with greater delicacy. His former manner had evidently given evidence of an intention of so doing; but long statements were an abomination, and he was naturally a man of few words. It was a cruel question, that struck hard, though Owen was prepared for it—it was the long-cherished secret of his life, rent away ruthlessly. It staggered him, and he pressed more heavily his hand against the library-table to support himself. He must have changed outwardly too, for Mr. Cherbury, as if sorry at his abruptness, said in a kinder tone,

“Take your time. It is a rough question, but as your employer I am forced to put it.”

“I have been in prison, Sir,” said Owen boldly.

What if in his dark estate he had been in prison a hundred times, now the evil shadows were gone and he was an honest man?

“For theft?”

“Yes.”

"And more than once?"

"Yes."

Owen answered more firmly every awkward question, and heeded not the change in Mr. Cherbury's countenance. It was growing more hard and grim than even business hours were accustomed to make it.

"I anticipated a denial of the charge, Mr. Owen. I could not suppose its confirmation."

"It is the truth, Sir, I am sorry to say—it is the one secret of my life, unknown to my best friends. It all happened when I was a boy; there were no friends round me, then, and the way was dark, and I was ignorant! I fought my way upwards, from the evil that might have ruined me."

"Perhaps so—perhaps so—but my father was not aware of it when he placed you here."

"Was I to blazon out my early disgrace?" cried Owen, a little warmly.

"And the head-clerk knows it now—and—and there is a mistake in the accounts."

"My God!"—and Owen dropped into a chair by the door, and then sprang from it again, erect and defiant.

"Not in my accounts, Sir—I defy you to prove that."

"In the accounts generally—there is a mistake somewhere of fifty pounds, and the whole books are thrown out, the head-clerk tells me."

"I heard him speaking of it yesterday—something has forgotten to be entered, probably by the clerks—I hope, Sir, you have no suspicion that I touched the money?"

"No—but—"

"But I am an honest man, and in this new life of mine, above suspicion."

"Who is there to suspect?—they are all honest men, Mr. Owen, young men whose families are respected and well known."

"I say it is a mistake."

Mr. Cherbury did not answer, and Owen, looking very white and firm, moved a step nearer him.

"A mistake that I will find before the day's out, Mr. Cherbury. That I will prove is an error of entry, with your permission."

"I shall be glad if you prove it," said Cherbury—"under the circumstances, unless it be proved—"

"Stay, if you please—when it is not proved, let me know your decision."

Mr. Cherbury looked into the young man's face and paused. It was a frank face now, and the dark eyes that were bent in

his direction were a trifle too much for him. He looked down, and felt a little annoyed with himself at having opened the subject so harshly; in his heart, which he seldom allowed to disturb him, there were the feelings of a gentleman. But he had not expected Owen's avowal, though he had desired the subject to be ventilated, and there *was* a mistake in the accounts!

If he had intended a threat to be conveyed in his last sentence, at Owen's request he did not complete it, and Owen went back to the office, collecting his thoughts by the way. Seated on the high stool he put away his regular work, and had the various account books brought him, and piled up on his desk. He felt there was an error of entry somewhere, and not of his own making—had Mr. Cherbury waited till balancing-day, next week, it would have shown itself, no doubt. The error was nothing to Owen, and did not trouble him—it was the cruel thought that his past life was known, which burned at his brain and made the room swim round with him. There was an enemy lurking somewhere against whom he must guard, and who had struck at him like a coward in the dark.

He thought of Glindon, and dismissed the thought—then he held his breath as it came back with tenfold force, and balked his discerning powers, Glindon, of whom he had been suspicious himself; Glindon, who had been his rival, and won the only prize of life he had thought worth the having. It was all plain enough; the old policeman, *her* father, had betrayed his secret to Glindon in a loquacious moment, and the rival had made capital of it to disgrace him. Glindon had been there that very morning, and it had all followed his appearance.

And over the sheets swarming with figures Owen cursed him, and into the heart of the mortified man entered thoughts and feelings which were to narrow it for many a day forth.

Meanwhile Mr. Cherbury sat watching the time-piece and praying for three o'clock. He was a man who obeyed the doctor's orders to the letter, although his faith in doctor's drugs and advice was not great. He had taken a powder and left his table, whereon another postal delivery had placed a dozen unopened letters, and when he had found a nap difficult to obtain with the hammers ringing across the yard, sought only to kill the monotony of his position by a little talk with his head clerk and Owen.

And now Owen troubled him, and increased his headache. He wished he had put off the interview with that young man, or waited a day or two to see if the missing fifty pounds

were likely to turn up—this prison business had all happened when Owen was a child it seemed, and though the child is father to the man, he had heard, yet in this instance he believed he had been a trifle too hasty. Still fifty pounds was a large sum, although the chief clerk in his interview of that morning had treated the matter lightly, and merely asked if the mistake were in the cheque-book—he who drew his own cheques, and never made mistakes!

It was singular that the amount should have been missed at once, when he numbered his cash transactions by thousands of pounds weekly—perhaps there was more than chance in it, and it was a warning to him after all.

He was very glad when three struck, and he could begin opening letters and answering them, and plunging into business again. He had satisfied his conscience by sending for the doctor—he was not going to neglect his health for anybody—and now he could set to work anew, and forget the little events that had harassed him.

A tap at the door.

“Come in.”

And Owen with a small book under his arm, made his reappearance.

He was very pale still, and having pushed his hair half-a-dozen different ways during his search for an error in the accounts, looked a trifle more wild than during the preceding interview.

“I have found the mistake, Sir—it’s your own, and the head clerk’s.”

“The devil!” ejaculated Mr. Cherbury.

“You drew twenty-two cheques on Friday last—one for the workmen’s wages, two thousand five hundred pounds, instead of two thousand five hundred and fifty, which sum the head clerk told you was necessary. The cash received from the bankers’ was entered in the books by Mr. Simmonds as two thousand five hundred and fifty, when fifty pounds less was received. The bankers’ book has just come in, and you’ll find the cancelled cheque there, Mr. Simmonds says.”

Owen laid the book on the desk, and Mr. Cherbury dived at it, and looked from his account to a cheque which he had drawn from the pocket.

“You’re right,” he muttered.

To have been robbed of a thousand pounds would have displeased him less just then. His pride was in his business accuracy, and this young man had proved him careless and slovenly, unless that Mr. Simmonds *did* ask for a cheque for

two thousand five hundred pounds. That *must* have been it, he was inclined to think. He rang for Simmonds immediately, and the head clerk came bustling into the room.

"It's your mistake, it appears, Simmonds."

"No, Sir—yours."

"You did not tell me two thousand five hundred and fifty pounds?"

"I wrote in for it, Sir—you were rather busy at the time."

Mr. Cherbury consulted a file of slips of paper, and scratched his head angrily at discovering Mr. Simmonds to be in the right.

"Still you counted the cash when it came from the bankers'," he said.

"Yes, Sir—but I had so got it across my mind that it must be the sum for which I wrote in, that——"

"Then you had no business to get anything so foolish across your mind, Sir," interrupted Mr. Cherbury, "it has led to a great unpleasantness."

"I'm very sorry that Mr. Owen has been connected with *our* mistake, Sir," said the clerk, "especially as that foolish story of——"

It was Owen's turn to interrupt.

"What! are you in the secret too?" he cried, fiercely. "Mr. Cherbury," turning to his employer, "is this gentleman aware of the subject of our last conversation?"

"Yes, Sir."

Well, it does not matter. It only confirms the resolution made when I was in this room an hour since. Mr. Cherbury, I ask your permission to leave your service at once."

Mr. Cherbury looked up. Mr. Simmonds ejaculated "God bless me!"

"You have not been backward in suspecting me as soon as the officious tongue of a friend told of an estate which no one can more bitterly regret than myself. Here, in your service, it is impossible to remain. You have lost confidence in me. My fellow clerks, all with whom I may come in contact from this day forth will distrust me."

"I should like you to consider," urged Mr. Cherbury.

"I have been in prison for theft, Sir," said Owen, bitterly.

Mr. Cherbury did not like his position. More than that, he was sorry for his clerk.

"I wouldn't be too hasty."

"I would not serve you again, Sir, for thrice my salary," said Owen. "Your father raised me above my station, and I have not been happy in it. I will descend and seek out a new life more fitting for me. I had forgotten the old until



you reminded me of it. I had hoped it was all sunk for ever. But you, your clerk, all who will hear the story now, will cry 'he was a thief,' and shrink away."

"Owen, I'm sorry it has happened," cried Mr. Cherbury.

It was a strange avowal for one usually so grim and icy, and even the old clerk looked about him with surprise. There was human nature at the bottom of this manufacturer's heart. Passion had played there, and his generous thoughts—such as his father had had—were only dying out, not dead.

"Thank you," said Owen, drily. "We are all sorry, I hope. You will be glad an hour or two hence that I seek to end it in this way. He who has been a thief, one must always suspect when accounts are wrong. It is the law of nature, and retributive justice on him whose hands have snatched at his neighbour's goods. I stole because I was a beggar and hungry—because I was set on by one who was hungry like myself—and because no one had taught me better. If your father had asked me years ago for this story, I would have told it him frankly, and declined his service, though I had died of shame at his feet. But I kept my secret because no one suspected me, and I have been to your father and to you a faithful servant."

"I believe it," said Mr. Cherbury, "and for that reason I ask you to remain and——"

"Mr. Cherbury, I am going to leave you. There is no power to make me stop when such a secret as mine has once escaped. If you consider I have not been here under false pretences, I will take my salary to this day. If you have your doubts on the point, I will relinquish it."

It was Mr. Cherbury's turn to feel humiliated. He did not know why. He had acted for the best, if a little churlishly, and it had come upon him with a great surprise, this news of Owen's juvenile delinquency. Mr. Cherbury could do nothing but write a cheque, however, and in the impulse of the moment offer a sum in excess of Owen's salary—a novel kind of conscience money, for taunting his subordinate with the old sins which he had long ago lived down.

Owen tore the cheque in two, and said, a little impatiently,

"Do not burden me with favours, Mr. Cherbury—let me feel independent and free. My salary is a quarter of a hundred and thirty-five pounds, minus the days between this and Michaelmas—for what I have worked I only desire to be paid."

"Very well, very well," said Mr. Cherbury, with a heightened colour; and, after a little calculation, a second cheque was drawn. Mr. Simmonds, troubled in his mind also, had re-

tired by this time, and Mr. Cherbury and our hero were alone together.

"That is correct to the farthing," said Mr. Cherbury, a little satirically ; "may I trouble you for a receipt?"

"I wrote it in the office, Sir," said Owen, tendering the required document in exchange for his salary.

There seemed nothing more necessary save to retire gracefully from an awkward interview, and Owen walked slowly to the door.

"One moment, Owen," said Mr. Cherbury, who had been watching his progress across the room.

Owen faced his master once more.

"Of course what has passed is a secret between you and me and Mr. Simmonds. Of course, if I am referred to for a character, I shall speak as I found you—honest, industrious, and energetic."

"I shall not trouble you as to character, Sir—you must keep something back ; and—what do you know of me, after all?"

And with this Parthian dart, Owen left the room, strode quickly along the passage to the counting-house, took his hat from the desk, nodded to his old fellow-clerks, and then went his way, full of a new resolve that, in the midst of much bitterness of spirit, kept him strong.





## CHAPTER IV.

### THE PAST COMES BACK.

**H**E would go abroad. There were ties still that held him to England, but they were not indissoluble, and of England he was tired. It was the theatre of his early disgrace, and of all his disappointments. He was restless and unsettled ; and a great change could only cure his secret despondency and his bitterness of spirit.

He would not go away for ever, but for a few years, until Mary Chickney grew up and required a stricter guardianship. What was to become of her if he stayed in London when his secret was bruited about that he had been a thief and in prison—when the doors of honest employment closed against him one by one, and he was thrown as much on the streets as in the old days before Tarby's wife rescued him from wrong ?

Owen was aggrieved, and, therefore, took a false view of things, as aggrieved persons do generally. The glass that he saw through darkly was a false medium just then, and the prospect before him was distorted. True, the tongue that betrayed his secret might whisper it again in a fresh quarter, and, if actuated by malice, wherefore should it pause ? He thought of Glindon, and gnashed his teeth over his injuries ; Glindon hated him, and would have no mercy, or he was an idler and a tattler, and would have no consideration.

And yet Glindon had only spoken the truth after all ; it would have been charitable to disguise it, but why should the man entertain much charity towards him ? They had been secretly at daggers drawn for some months, and possibly this humiliation was deserved on Owen's part. Glindon had had a chance of striking a blow and lost it not. So be it ; his turn might come some day, to strike back with all his might !

And he sat and nursed that idea, with the devil at his elbow, till half John Dell's good teachings were buried beneath the load of darker thoughts which brooding on his wrongs had given birth to.

John Dell came at a later hour of that day, the stormy incidents of which were not yet over, to offer him all the comfort it was in his power to afford.

"Owen," said he, entering and coming direct to our hero, "I've been talking with Mr. Cherbury."

"About me?"

"Yes."

"An unpleasant subject."

Dell might have added a remark equally unpleasant and uncomplimentary had it been an occasion of less moment, but at that time he was grave and in earnest.

"Mr. Cherbury has told me all, I think."

"And he who talked of keeping my secret betrays it to the only friend whose respect I would have retained," cried Owen angrily.

"What difference does it make in me?"

"It will make a difference—the shadow of my disgrace must lie between me and you, Mr. Dell, as it lies between me and all old projects, wishes, I have formed."

"Don't you think I have known it all along?"

"Have you?" cried Owen, eagerly.

"Yes."

Owen seized his hand, and wrung it in his own. He bit his lips to keep the tears from his eyes, but they would come, although his strong effort of will kept them from welling over.

"And your brother was the informant?"

"Hardly. I guessed as much in the old Hannah Street days, from a little slip of his, and I heard the rest of the story from Mrs. Chickney."

"A sad story, Dell," said Owen, gloomily.

"Not a bit of it."

"How's that?" and Owen looked up surprised.

"I say it's a bright story, with the sun shining on it. A story of God's goodness, in rescuing you from the downward path. If it end in ingratitude, why, that makes the story sad—nothing else."

"Ingratitude to whom?"

"*The Rescuer*," said Dell solemnly.

Owen was touched, but it was with Dell's earnestness; with the fresh proof of the man's great heart, the man's intense interest in his welfare.

"Well, I am punished, Mr. Dell," said he with a faint

smile ; " what I have been saved from, what I was, I have been reminded of to-day."

" Is it anything so serious ? "

" It is to me. It changes my life."

" Rubbish."

" I shall go abroad, and earn my living there. I'm young, strong, and able to push my way onwards."

" How easy it seems to talk of going abroad ! "

" Mr. Dell, I have no other chance," said our hero ; " or if I had, I can't follow it. I am a coward, and fear hearing again in my ears the cry of ' Thief.' I sinned in my youth, and the sin rises again like a ghost. Besides, I am unhappy here."

" Then go ! "

And Dell laid his hand on his shoulder as though it were a blessing, and he were wishing him God speed.

" I shall be sorry to lose you, Owen," said he, " for my lonely time is coming—my niece, and now you ! And I had been thinking of a plan of setting up in a small way for myself, and making a partner of you in my enterprise."

" You will get on better without me, Mr. Dell. I am an unlucky fellow."

" We shall see," said Dell ; " there's not much to grumble at yet."

" Well, perhaps I am misanthropical."

" More than likely," was the sententious response.

" And I am ungrateful, especially to you, Sir. You heap on me fresh proofs of your confidence, and I am already bewildered when I look back at the old, and learn how the sins of my childhood were known to you."

" You outlived them ; you began a new life, and I saw that it was in earnest. Is it taught us to turn from the sinner, when he flies from the guilt and shows by every act his repentance ? "

" And Ruth—what does she know ? "

" Only that you were a poor boy at Chickncy's when I first saw you."

" She will know all now," groaned Owen, as he thought of Glindon.

" Should she know it, she will respect you more, knowing from what a depth you have worked your way. But I have kept your secret, and will see that my brother keeps it too."

Owen did not answer ; the secret had gone beyond Dell or his own power to stay it—too many in the world were already acquainted with it.

" You talk of going abroad ; for how long ? "

"Five or six years, till Mary is a woman, and requires a brother's care," said Owen; "she is in good hands now, and I think I may trust you to see her occasionally, and write to me all the news, and receive my remittances in her behalf. All this, if—if I don't take her with me."

"Better leave her where she is," said Dell; "she will clog your first efforts, and she is safe here."

"I will think of it—I am a trifle too bewildered at present to sketch any settled plan. I may be walking in dream-land, for what I know of the matter."

"May you wake to a brighter life—a better one, Owen!"

"Thank you."

"What a 'thank you' and what a doleful countenance!" said Dell, with forced cheerfulness. "Do you think to make a fortune, and start in search of it with a face like Don Quixote's?"

"You must give me your advice as to the best way of setting forth in life, Mr. Dell."

"Confidence in yourself and faith in your God," was the quick answer.—"There is no better advice this side of the grave. There is no—but I won't preach!"

It was the old cry, and he turned away and cut short his exordium. He could have grown eloquent then, but there was a hard expression on Owen's face, and he felt no words of his would soften his comrade at that time. Still, he did not like to leave him with that darkling countenance; and in talking of the life to which Owen seemed to have made up his mind, a chance word might bring forward a subject on which he was anxious to dwell, for the sake of one to whom his heart yearned as to a son.

He was anxiously watching Owen, whose reverie had become a deep and gloomy one, when a peculiar knock, heavy and clumsy, like a coal-porter's, or a street-beggar's, aroused the echoes of the house. There was nothing remarkable in a single knock in the dusk of the evening, at a house in the Kennington Road, and yet both listened attentively, and looked from one to the other.

Dell broke into a laugh.

"I think we must be two nervous old women to-night," he said.

The words had scarcely left his lips when the little maid-servant, who had responded to the summons, gave a scream from below, as something fell heavily in the passage.

Dell darted from the room, and as Owen stood on the stairs a moment afterwards, he could see him bending over a figure lying in the hall.

"A light, girl! a light!" he said; "keep there, Owen, and don't come blocking up the way. Keep there, I say," he repeated, with a strange fierceness; "we must have air down here."

There was a light flickering in the passage a moment afterwards, and Dell, forgetting his last injunctions, pushed the street door to before he raised the head of the prostrate figure, and looked into its face.

"Who are you, woman?—what's your name?" he asked; 'whom do you want?'

"Owen," demanded a hoarse voice.

"Owen, do you know this woman?" said Dell, looking towards the stairs.

Two downward leaps brought Owen to the side of the woman, whose tangled hair he pushed lightly aside, with a hand that was struck at angrily for his pains.

It was a face he had not looked into for many years—a seared, swollen face, in which all claim to womanhood might be utterly extinguished, for any lingering trait of it that showed itself that night.

"Do you know her?" asked Dell, once more, with feverish impatience.

"Yes—she is my mother!"





## CHAPTER V.

### MOTHER !

**Y**ES, it was his mother, risen as from the awful grave of the past, and lying there to scare him. Years had not so much altered or aged her but that he recognised her, and recoiled as at his deadliest enemy.

In his time of trouble she appeared to add to his sense of desolation ; she had crossed his path in the time of the great grief that followed the better mother's death in Hannah Street, and now she lay before him, to add to his shame and mortification on a day that would be ever full of bitter memories.

He could have no love for her, or feel no pleasure in the knowledge that she lived ; she only lay there a reproach, a witness to how low a woman lost to right can fall. He felt as if his life were cursed, and that no good could come to him from such a parentage ; from so much evil must spring evil in its turn !

Owen might well have some such morbid thoughts to look upon her then—so utter a wreck of all that was fair and womanly had been cast at his feet. Shadows had flitted by him in the dark crowded streets at times—shadows of lost, benighted women, like unto this—but he had feared to face them, glance towards them, and now this one had tracked him out and claimed him, and was at his feet in John Dell's house.

There was little change in her, he thought, since the day they went to Markshire together—since he lay down to sleep in Jack Archer's tent on the Downs, and she had cursed him for a pig-headed, drowsy brute, who wouldn't stop awake to amuse her. She was sitting half crouched against the wall,



and half against John Dell's knees, fighting hard for a clear perception of things, which had been slightly disarranged by her fall, and Owen shuddered to think how like she was to the old grim past that had grown unreal and dream-like to him until then.

The same torn plaid shawl that had caught in every nail and splinter until it seemed impossible to rend again, seemed half hanging from her shoulders and half trailing on the floor ; the battered old straw bonnet might be the one she had flung at him in excited moments, and jumped upon and torn at with her teeth ; and the remnants of the dress huddled round her she surely wore when he was as ragged and neglected as herself. Owen had felt long since that if she ever came back to disgrace him she would come back like this ; he had seen her fifty times in his dreams, as ragged, forlorn, depraved, and drunken as in that moment. The one difference that he had not thought of was in her dishonoured gray hairs, which her hand kept feebly pushing back from her face and trying to tuck into her bonnet, as she sat there a woman whom Owen might have been pardoned for wishing she might die and end his shame there.

"You can go down stairs," said Dell, taking the light from the maid-servant, who after another amazed look at the scene, disappeared to the lower regions.

"Can you walk now?" asked Dell, leaning over the woman.

She regarded her questioner vacantly for some moments, and then made a scramble to regain her feet, clutching at the wall and John Dell's legs.

"Lean on me," said Owen sternly, and the woman's hand was drawn within his arm, and they were standing side by side, mother and son.

"Mr. Dell, may I ask room for my mother in your house a little while?"

"Is there any need to ask it of me, Owen?"

"You are very good—but—but this woman is such a disgrace to you."

"Neither to you nor to me," said Dell, shortly ; "we have no share in it. God knows, it has been no fault of ours."

Owen's mother suffered herself to be led into the little parlour, and carefully deposited in an arm-chair, where her chances of falling were only limited to a forward direction, against which contingency Owen and Dell, sitting near her, were prepared.

So much prepared, that the woman took it as an insult to her powers of self-command, and looked angrily from one to another.

"What are you sitting like that for, both of you?" she said; "don't you think I have taken care enough of myself in my time, to forget what's all proper and straight? You needn't fear me coming on the fender—I never hurt myself."

"Do you know me?" asked Owen.

The woman took both hands to her hair this time, and pushed it back a tangled mass behind her ears. Owen drew his breath with horror. No, no, never in his dreams had such a face as that been bent so close to scare him! Drink-swollen, smeared with dirt, grazed and bleeding from some fall on the kerb-stones without—it was more like the face of a witch than a woman's.

"So you're Owen, I suppose?"

"I am Owen—your son."

"Don't call me son, jacka—napes," she said contemptuously; "I throw you off and disown you—you've never been a credit to me and my bringings up. You began to thieve before you could speak plain—you did."

"What do you want here?"

"What do I want here!" repeated she; "well, I want to see you. Haven't I a mother's feelings?" she cried, changing her insolent tone to a low whine; "haven't I been put upon enough and ground down enough, that after all these heaps of years I'm asked by my own boy what I want here. Oh, how thirsty I am!"

"Dell, will you leave us?"

Dell seemed to hesitate, once turned to the woman as if to address her, then rose and went out of the room, running one hand after the other through his bushy hair.

"What can I want but help, do you think?" she said; "you're my son and have money, and I have been a beggar in the streets for thirteen years, or locked up in a workus or a prison. I'd rather die in a prison than a workus," she said reflectively; "there's more meat and less slop—not that I care much for eating, my child. Oh! how thirsty I am! God bless you—how you've grown!"

The woman's moods were variable, but of all of them Owen recoiled at any evidence of affection. He felt how false and unreal it was, and that the words were a mockery, which chilled him. Her hot hand had fallen on his, and he had drawn his hand hastily away and frowned.

"Oh! the airs of my gentleman," said she, taking up the contemptuous vein again; "mustn't be touched by his—his—own mother, because she hasn't washed since Friday. Because he's a swell, and wears fine black clothes, and goes to

office, and lives in a grand house, and, and—Owen, for the Lord Almighty's sake, lend us one-and-sixpence !”

Her claw-like hand clutched at the sleeve of his coat, and he made no attempt to shake it off a second time. Let it rest there—it was the hand of a mother !

“I will give you money to-morrow—when you are sensible,” said Owen ; “sit still now and keep quiet.”

“I was always a wild one,” with a short laugh ; “I’ve had rare fun in my time—I shall only be quiet in my grave.”

“How did you find me out ?” asked Owen, anxious to change the subject.

“I’ve had my eye on you—off and on you—for a long time. I knew where you were—and you saved me a mite of trouble and harass, and weren’t any longer an expense to me for board and lodging, and—and education. I was locked up for a couple of years after that, and then I—oh ! how thirsty I am !—then I missed you, and then I found you, and then I was locked up again, and at last it has struck me you could help me with a bit of money.”

“It has been a long while striking you.”

“No, it hasn’t,” she said quickly, “but I had always a proper spirit, and I thought I wouldn’t come near you ; and I’ve been locked up so much, you see. Now, about the eighteenth pence ?”

“To-morrow—to-morrow.”

“Ah ! that’s what the man says in the play—but you don’t get over me with your to-morrow—I’m too old a bird now. I was ruined with that promise, Owen—by God !”

“In that God’s name, cease !” cried Owen, vehemently.

“Get us something to drink, then—I’m so cursed thirsty.”

Dell entered at this juncture with a cup of strong tea, and the woman would have fallen out of the chair in her eagerness to rise, had not Owen’s strong arm retained her in her place.

“Here—drink this,” said Dell.

The cup clattered in the saucer beneath the woman’s trembling hand, and her teeth rattled against the edge of the cup for a moment or two before she tossed the tea down her throat, in true dram-drinker’s fashion.

“Ah ! it’s poor stuff !” was her ungrateful remark, as Dell took the cup from her and placed it on the table.

“It will clear your head a bit,” quietly remarked Dell.

“I like it muddled.”

“Well, it’s a matter of taste,” was the response. There was no humour intended, for Dell was very stern that night,

but the woman laughed at the remark, and it was a shrill discordant evidence of hilarity, that froze them both.

"A muddled head's good for some complaints—Lord bless you, it wouldn't do for me to think, if I—I wanted to steer clear of that Bedlam place at the back here. Why, I'm often a mind to drown myself as it is, and—" in a husky whisper, as she turned her bloodshot eyes on Owen, "I've been awfully near it once or twice."

Owen did not answer. He looked so troubled, so perplexed, as to what was to become of this woman, that Dell stepped forward to the rescue.

"You will stay here to-night," said he, addressing her in his usual abrupt way.

"I don't care about it," was the response ; "if Owen 'll give me a little money, I'll——"

"You'll stay here to-night," interrupted Dell, more sharply.

The woman started, and looked more intently at him who had thus imperatively expressed his opinion. So intently, with her hands on the arms of the chair, as if she were about to make an effort to raise herself by them, that Dell turned away and made a feint of shifting the cup and saucer from the table to the mantelpiece.

"Mr. Dell, I can't think of this," said our hero.

"Owen, it's no trouble. There's a spare bed, and she mustn't venture into the streets to-night. Remember who this woman is, with all her sins and weakness."

"I would not turn her out, but——"

"But don't think of me. What trouble is it to me, do you think, Owen? She is your mother—you must not cast her away."

He was strangely excited ; Owen could see that he was trembling as he turned to look at her once more. She was sitting in the same position, with a hand on each arm of the chair, and her wild eyes glaring at him. Dell met her steadfast looks this time, and she gasped forth—

"You are John Dell, of Markshire?"

"Yes."

"Ah ! that's *funny* now—to think, after all these years, that——"

"Not a word more now," said Dell, sternly ; "you are not fit to talk—I am not fit to listen. It is a cruel day for you and me—a cruel meeting ; and I ask you, if you have any power to comprehend, to say no more at this time."

"I am quiet," murmured the woman.

"The servant is waiting outside to see you to bed," said Dell ; "shall Owen or I assist you up stairs?"

"I think I'll take the boy's arm," she said ; "I'm a trifle loosish on the legs still."

Owen offered her his arm, and rising, and leaning heavily upon it, she and her son went from the room. She was silent all that slow, weary way up stairs, and Owen made no attempt to break the stillness. The servant was waiting in the room, into which she stumbled.

"You can go," said the mother to her.

"But I'm not to leave you until——"

"I shall lie down on the bed," said she ; "I haven't undressed for six weeks, and I aint a-going to begin now for anybody, and tear my things worse than they are."

"Take away the light," said Owen ; and the maid-servant, glad to be so soon rid of her charge, complied, and hurried down stairs. There was a full moon that night, and the room was far from dark after the maid-servant had withdrawn. The woman appeared not to notice the difference, but flung herself on the bed face-foremost, and told Owen somewhat roughly to leave her.

"I shall see you in the morning, mother."

"Oh ! yes."

"Is there anything I can do for you before I go ?"

"Nothing."

"Good-night, then."

"Good-night."

Owen softly closed the door and went down half-a-dozen stairs, then paused. He fancied that she called him, then that she was sobbing in her room. He went back and pushed open the door.

He could see her dark figure on the bed still. She had changed her position somewhat, and was lying with her two arms stretched above her head and her hands clasped. He was right in his second surmise, too—she was sobbing and moaning extravagantly, although amidst her wild abandonment of grief there were the germs of real agony, such as she had not felt for many a long day.

"Mother, what is it ?—are you ill ?"

"Shut the door—shut the door, and don't trouble me !" she cried ; "it is nothing to do with you, or the likes of you, what I am making myself a fool about. It's only a mad freak—and I'm raving mad with drink !"

Owen quitted her reluctantly, and descended the stairs to the room in which he had left John Dell. He found that true friend sitting at the table, with his elbow thereon, and his square chin clutched in his hand. The weight of a great

care was on him—it seemed to have already lined his face and aged it.

“Come and sit here, Owen—this is a strange night for both of us.”

“For both?”

“Ay!—you must have seen and noticed that I am not myself—that your mother and I are creatures of the past, who have had thoughts and wishes in common, and on whom the world was hard. On her especially—for, good God, to what a depth she has fallen!”

“You knew her before?”

“Long before—when she was a young woman, and you were not born, to add to her cruel shame. Owen, lad, I thought once that she would have been my wife?”





## CHAPTER VI.

### "THE OLD STORY."

**J**OHNN DELL and Owen were silent for some time after the shock of the revelation. It had been a struggle to confess ; it had been a painful shock for Owen to listen to such news. Owen could understand all that had been a mystery to him ; all the inner depths of Dell's character that had perplexed him were, by his own words, brought to light.

"From such a disappointment as mine, may God keep every honest man free," he had said, in speaking of his own griefs to Owen ; and Owen knew then what a child-like trouble his had been, in comparison to his old friend's.

"There's nothing new in the story, Owen," he said, after a long pause ; "it's an old story, though you might have doubted my connection with it ; it's the story that happens every day. They would be cruel statistics if the numbers who fall away from right could be estimated with our births and deaths—the birth of the new sin, and the awful moral death which makes life a mockery must happen fifty times a day to crowd our streets with suffering, reckless women. What a leprosy must exist under the fair mask of outward appearance to work such evil, Owen?"

"It is an evil world, and there's no justice in it."

"Hush ! lad—that's wrong."

"You are of greater faith, Mr. Dell," said Owen, bitterly ; "but what comfort has it brought you?"

"Comfort that the world can't take away, Owen," returned Dell ; "it's a sad moment with me now, but it does not shake my faith in God, or his mercies. Why do you sneer?"

"Pardon me, I was wrong. And I am in a dark, desperate mood, when I would sting my best friend."

"Well, the friend forgives you."

"Will you tell me of my mother? I do not ask you for details, but for any fragments of her misspent life that will touch my heart, and teach me charity towards her."

"What her life has been, God knows," said Dell; "when I first knew her—when I saw her last—she was a young, fair woman. Wondrously fair, people thought her at that time; a little vain of her looks, and more fond of admiration than was good for her. I was an apprentice then—just out of my time—and she was a year or two my senior. I loved her, I told her so frankly, and she was to wait for me two years, till I could work upwards to a home for both. It was a settled engagement between us, and having faith in her, I had no more fear of losing her than I had of losing my life. I put my whole trust in her, and I had patience to wait. It was a happy time enough, with a fair prospect beyond, and it lasted eighteen months, and then I went away for a quarter of a year on business of my employer's. The night before I left Markshire was the last time I ever saw her until now. I was coming back to marry her, when they told me she had left home, mother and friends."

Owen groaned.

"So the old story, as I said, and the old end to it. I could guess it all when first stung by my disappointment. I see it realised to-night."

He was silent for a moment, then he said, quickly,—

"But shall this be the end? May it not be willed otherwise, Owen? She is under my roof, and you are her son."

"What is a son's duty in this instance?" was the gloomy rejoinder.

"Ask your own heart!" said Dell, as he leaped from his chair, and left the room precipitately.

But Owen's heart was troubled, and before him, and around him, was confusion. What could be his duty to one who had ever neglected a mother's duty to him? He could give her money, which she would spend in drink: but he could not feign affection, or expect affection from her. He could not talk religion to her, for he had no faith in religion himself, and was every day becoming more hard and sceptical. Of her life and character he had had more experience than John Dell, and he believed the case a vain and hopeless one. Had he but the simple faith of Ruth's uncle, he might have prayed for strength to undertake a task of reformation.

Owen sat up that night, despite the expostulations of John Dell. He had a fear that his mother would steal down at a



later hour and rob the place, or, at all events, attempt to leave the house. And he had a strange desire to see her again—this erring mother, whose name he had never borne.

The next day was Sunday, and Owen's mother made not an early appearance down stairs. John Dell departed for church; the servant carried the woman up some breakfast, the liquid portion of which she drank, and the solids of which were put outside the door, along with her breakfast tray, into which Owen trod, in going up stairs, half an hour afterwards.

"Mother," he cried, knocking softly at the door—"will you come down stairs now? I wish to speak to you."

"Not now—presently."

"Will you open your door?" said Owen, after trying it, and finding it locked on the inside.

"I will come down soon—don't worry me."

Later in the day, when John Dell had returned, she came slowly down stairs, walked into the room wherein they sat, and looked from one to the other, half-nervously, half-defiantly.

"I am sober now," she said; "shall I go away?"

"Sit down, please," returned Dell.

She sat down in the chair of yesternight, and put her bonnet at her feet, ready to be snatched up at any moment. It was a wan face in the broad daylight. The eyes were sunk deep in the head, and the lines and scars were numberless. She had made some faint attempt to present a more reputable appearance; her hair was arranged with some degree of order; and she had pinned a smart pink bow, that she had found on the dressing-table, and which was the servant's property, on to the tattered bosom of her dress, where it shone out in glaring contrast, and roused the bile of the maid, who came in at this juncture to lay the dinner-cloth.

"In a moment or two, Jane," said Dell; and Jane, with another glance at her bow, to make quite sure that so cool an appropriation was not a dream, went out of the room, looking daggers.

"Do you think you are able to hear reason now?" asked Dell.

"I don't know—I don't want to hear it," said the woman, morosely. "What good has hearing reason ever done me?"

"Not much; but still you have come hither, and your son is anxious concerning you."

"Is he?" with a glance at Owen.

"Yes," answered Owen.

"I wish I had dropped down dead before I had entered the house," said the woman. "It was only drink that brought me here at last. Sober, and I've kept away and starved or stolen rather than come near him,—knowing what a wretch I was."

"You have done this?" asked Owen, with more interest.

"Why shouldn't I own it," she replied. "It's to my credit, and there isn't much of that which falls to my share. You were getting on in the world, and I didn't see why I should spoil your chance by my ugly self. I wasn't going to sponge on you at any rate."

She was not wholly bad then! Here was a fitful gleam passing athwart her rugged nature, and the son's heart, only waiting for one sign, yearned to help her.

"When I'm drunk I'm mad. Wasn't I mad last night, John Dell?"

"Possibly."

"To think of coming here and meeting you. Aint the times changed since you and I were sweethearts?"

The woman shuddered as she spoke, although she feigned to make light of it, by indulging in a hideous little laugh.

"You don't want to talk of that time," said Dell. "It's past."

"I only want to do one thing."

"What is that?"

"Drown myself."

Owen remembered the old threat. When he was a boy she was always asserting her intention to perpetrate that act, and the habit had not left her. And she had wished it many years, and more than once had stood at the river's brink meditating what sort of death it would be, and ever recoiling from the mysterious Afterwards, and going back heart-sick and desperate to the life which was a horror and a shame.

"You are reckless and foolish."

"True enough, John. Wasn't I so when I knew you and played you false? Sha'n't I be so to the end?"

"Unless God soften you."

"Oh! you were always a bit of a parson, John," said she, "and that set me against you first. You were too steady and good for me, who was a flighty one. I—I think I'll go now."

"Where?" asked Dell.

"Anywhere. I've no home just at present."

"Don't you ever think of turning back—doing better?" said Dell, eagerly.

"My God!—*me!*"

"Yes—you."

"Where's the chance—where's the likes of such a thing?" she cried. "Isn't every man's hand against me? Wasn't it too late years ago?"

"No!" cried Dell. "And it is not too late now—it can never be too late to say, 'Father, I have sinned. Have mercy on me.' Margaret, won't you make some effort now?"

"What's it to end in?"

"Salvation! Is it worth nothing?"

"I don't know. You're talking awfully! Oh, what a fool I was ever to come here!"

"Mother, will you trust to me?" cried Owen, with excitement. "In the years that have parted us I have learned to live better, and become an honest man. Will you be the true and honest mother of that man in the years that are left you? I am going abroad, to begin a new life. Will you share it with me, and begin anew also?"

The woman gave one terrified look from one to the other, and then covered her face with her hands. She could have met reproaches, curses, anything better than kind words. They were new to her, and unnerved her.

She dropped her hands, and there were signs of tears upon her face. Even in that short time Owen fancied the face was more softened and womanly.

"It's only the drink," said she, as if to defend her weakness. "I was crying drunk last night, and it hasn't all worked off yet. I'm bothered with this talk of you both. It don't seem natural—it can't be true."

"Will you think of my offer?" said Owen. "Will you try and reflect what good it may do you and me?"

"And you—why you?"

"By showing me that the mother who deserted me years ago is not all bad—that she is strong enough to make one effort to turn from the evil of her ways."

"The best thing I ever did was to desert you; the worst I could ever do, would be to come back and call you son. I'm sober now, and know what I'm about. Don't let us have any more of it. You can't mean it—it's a *spurt*."

"Try me."

And in the new hope lying before him, Owen felt strong again, though the days were early yet in which to acknowledge it. The woman looked wistfully at him—he was her child, and in her way, perhaps, she had loved him. If she could only keep sober, and feel always as she did just then, she might teach herself to worship him. For he had offered her new life, and new life to her—what did it mean?

"P'raps going abroad is better than drowning," she said,

after a little reflection. "Will you have your dinner, you two, and let me go up stairs again to think it over?"

"Will you not——" began Dell.

"I'll not touch bit or sup to-day," she cried, tetchily; "you can't do better than leave me to myself."

Dell and Owen were of the same opinion, and made no further effort to stay her. When she had gone, they ate their dinner gravely and silently, or rather made a pretence of eating, for both hearts were full. When the cloth was removed, Dell said:

"You have made a great offer, Owen—do you flinch yet from such an undertaking?"

"Do I look as if I were flinching?"

"No; but I cannot think you have weighed all the consequences of this step."

"If I can but save her from herself!"

"You may do it—it is not impossible. Backed by a true religious feeling, it may be done; devoid of confidence in your God, and having trust but in yourself, you will fail."

"Still, I will try."

"You are stubborn, Owen; but I think your heart is softening. Should it not change now, it never will."

"I may be more a Christian—I may have your great and trusting faith, if my mother be spared to live a better life, and not become my lasting shame."

"Ah! I see now; it's all pride, not charity. And you would drive a bargain with your God, as though He were a pedlar?"

"I'm thinking of my mother's welfare."

"Partly," was the dry response.

An hour afterwards, and Owen's mother returned. The pink bow had been replaced on the dressing-table, and her dress and gray hair had been once more re-arranged.

"Owen, you're a kind young man. I've thought it all over, and I'm going to grow such a good one. All of a sudden, like the people in penny tracts."

"Well?"

"I'll go abroad, and you must find me a place out there—perhaps I'll be your housekeeper, if you won't tell anybody I'm your mother. While I'm here I can't live with you or *him*,"—glancing towards Dell—"you must find me a room, till you're ready to start."

"And I can trust you then?"

"Yes, yes," with a nervous look in his direction; "I think you can trust me, but I'm very weak."

"Courage!" said Dell.

A text was on his lips, but he had preached too much that day, he was inclined to think, and the woman, during the last few moments, had appeared to shrink from him. He was too cold and stern in his manner, perhaps, and she could not forget how she had wronged him in the early days, when his heart was young. Still, he bore her no malice ; and he was anxious to tell her that all had long since been forgiven ; that it was part of the duty of his daily life to forgive all trespasses against him.

He wanted a long talk with Owen ; he saw Owen was excited, and unlike himself ; he felt a few words at that time might be of service to the lad. And amidst it all there was a doubt of Owen's mother's stability of purpose. The change had been too sudden, was one of impulse, showed too little of mortification of spirit. The good at the bottom of every one's heart had been evinced that day, escaping from the murky depths to God's daylight ; but the depths were there still, and the ascent was steep. Owen would trust to himself and his strong will ; he would not believe in God's power to work a change, till the change had been worked by his own hand. He had no confidence in religion aiding him in the great, difficult task of reforming one who had sinned before he was born, and fallen deeper, deeper, with every year of his after-life. He would be religious presently—for then he would be grateful ; forgetting that for all the past gifts he had evinced but little gratitude, and thinking not how he had turned and grown callous under trials which, in comparison with those lying beyond, were only snow-flakes in the sunshine.



## CHAPTER VII.

### THE FIRST PARTING.

**Q**UENE swallow makes not a summer, and one impulsive leap to a purer moral atmosphere constitutes not a repentance. There are sudden changes in the nature of things evil to things good, but they are the exceptions to the rule ; from the darkness to the light is an ascent, and not to be made by one step. The natural craving for new life must be followed by the earnest purpose to fight upwards and deserve it—they are strewing the way now, those good resolutions, those efforts to live better, with which we set out on our journey !

Owen's mother had been touched by kind words when she had least expected them, and the interest of the son in her had awakened thoughts and feelings that had slumbered since her girlhood. Yes, she would turn at the eleventh hour, and enter on her new existence, and be her son's house-keeper, slave, anything to escape from the dangers which beset her. She was poor, and in rags, and food and drink were uncertainties with her ; the workhouse she abhorred, and though there was better fare at the prisons, yet they cut her hair and made her pick coir there, spoiling her personal appearance, and wearying her to death with monotonous labour. It would be better to be taken care of by a son who was going abroad—that handsome boy, who had grown up such a blessed credit to her !

These were not her first thoughts, but her second. There was a new series, a third to follow, but of that we shall speak in its place. The first thoughts were shame and repentance, the second were of expediency. She saw what was best for her and accepted it, and even made more than a single effort to deserve her son's kindness and faith. But she was not

happy, and did not feel as if she ever should be—it was very hard upon her !

Owen, whose heart was in his work, did his best to keep her strong ; his absence from his old post placed the greater part of his time at her disposal, and he spent it in talking of their life together in the new world wherein neither of them would be known. If she would not be happy with him, she might obtain a place abroad, or he might set her up in some little business—there was nothing done without a trial, he assured her. He told the story of his own progress from an estate as shadowy as hers ; but she was growing old in years, and could not wait so long to earn the respect of honest folk. His perseverance chilled her—she was afraid he would expect too much from her. And kind as he was in his way, yet he was a grave, stern young man take him altogether, and if she stumbled on her path she was certain he would have no mercy.

“ I put my trust in you, mother—do not abuse it. I link the honest name I have earned with your own—do not cast it back to its first disgrace by letting me sink with you. I am jealous of your welfare now, for it is my own.”

She could scarcely understand him, but she felt he would not pardon her again—that this was her first and last chance, and he would be of iron if she let it slip. She was proud of him—in her own way she was learning to love him—but she was afraid of him. Had Owen been a religious man the end of all this might have been more assuring, but he was waiting to be religious. John Dell was right—Owen would drive a bargain with his Maker. He would form his own narrow estimate of God’s mercy by his mother’s actions—if she repented he would follow God, and if she swerved he would be a sceptic to the end. A Christian out of gratitude, or a man of the world, worldly, in defiance of Him who had been so hard and relentless ! This was the agreement he had drawn out for himself, though he scarcely knew it—though he might have shuddered had the articles been put before him as we have put them to our readers.

John Dell worked on a different principle, but his power was less, and he saw less of the patient. More than that, Owen’s mother objected extremely to John Dell’s appearance—it was from the better days, wherein she had been innocent and pure. Dell’s presence was ever a reproach, and she could not bear it ; every moment she feared he would speak of the past, and crush her with the horror of its retrospect. He talked to her of God’s mercy—of the change in her, for which she ought to be thankful, and pray for strength to proceed—

but she was ever thinking of their old relations to each other, and how cruelly she had wronged him. It was kind of him, but she could not bear to hear the sound of his voice—and if Owen did not preach to her about her sins, and her duty to seek forgiveness for them by prayer and supplication, why couldn't *he* leave her for a little while, until she had grown stronger. She expressed as much one day, crying and wringing her hands, and John Dell wavered. He had alarmed her by speaking of her present awful position, and perhaps he was too precipitate,—he had never had confidence in too much preaching. When he should have persevered most, he halted. When he had touched her heart and made her wince, he turned away and let the iron cool and harden. He would wait a better opportunity—for he would not neglect his chance here—and the opportunity to both their lives never again came back.

Concerning that past life to which she dreaded John Dell's allusions, Owen spoke one day.

"My life, which is yours, is a mystery. My right name I have never borne or known. The fate that parted you from a man who would have made your future bright, and cast you down so utterly, I have a right to know."

"Oh, for mercy's sake, don't go on like that!" she cried.

"I must know all, mother," said Owen, firmly.

"It's all over and past. No good can come of it; and if it drives me mad to think about, what do you expect talking will do?" she asked, with almost her old surliness.

"Place confidence between us," said Owen, quietly.

"You're down upon me too much."

"No, I am not," answered Owen; "I am but fair and open, and wish the same in return. Take your own time, but sooner or later you *must* tell me all."

"Some day, then," said the woman, catching eagerly at a postponement; "some day, Owen dear. But think what a poor weak woman I am just now."

Owen put off the evil day; and his mother, who had taken the name of Owen, and would answer to no other name, breathed freer in consequence.

Owen was not living with John Dell at that time; he had rented a sitting-room and two bed-rooms in a street near his old friend's house. If any fresh disgrace were to accrue, John Dell should not share it, and all the credit of raising his mother upwards must be his own. It was his duty, and he was jealous of interference. Even to those visits of Dell, to which we have already alluded, he had at that time almost his mother's distaste. Owen worked hard for his one great



object, and was gratified by witnessing some improvement. Differently dressed, his mother was a different woman, and the face, hard and stony still, was not, however, the bruised, distorted countenance which the light had fallen on in John Dell's passage. He trusted her with money for his house-keeping, and she abused not his trust; he had interdicted drink the first day of their reunion, and she had obeyed him implicitly. Still she was dull and thoughtful—at times restless—and Owen, feeling it would be better for both to leave England as early as possible, hastened his preparations for departure.

It was all accomplished at last—his own and his mother's outfit, their passage booked in an Australian vessel, and but three more days to be spent on English soil. In those three days there were leave-takings to occur, and arrangements to make with Mrs. Cutchfield and John Dell concerning Mary, his ward.

The coming parting with Mary troubled him most. At times he felt as if he were breaking a promise made to a dying woman, by leaving the child alone in England.

"You can't take her with you, Owen," reasoned Dell; "you have no settled home, and you are too young a guardian. Your mother, too—you will pardon me—is not a fit companion for her, however much she may have reformed."

"You are right."

"And you are not going away for ever."

"I shall return in six years."

"God willing," added John Dell.

"In six years I will have stepped forward or sunk," said Owen, not heeding his friend's remark; "if I come back a rich man I will accept that partnership you offered one day. That is," he added, "if you are of the same mind."

"Always the same mind with the same old friend."

And the two men shook hands with tears in their eyes.

"And poor Mary," said Owen, reverting to the subject which troubled him most; "you must see after her, Mr. Dell. Keep the secret of her father's life from her, write me all the news concerning her—we shall correspond very often—and rely on my punctual remittances."

"Ruth will see to her, Owen; Ansted is not far away from her."

"Ruth will marry and leave Ansted long before I return," said Owen.

"True—I had forgotten."

And I had almost forgotten there is Ruth to part with too," added Owen.

He had forgotten nothing of the kind, but it was his pleasure to think so, and Dell did not consider it worth while to express his doubts of the fact. The last day Dell and Owen went together to Ansted, or rather to the little cottage on the Ansted Road, where 92 imitated Cincinnatus and abjured the cares of state, and had a little advantage over the Roman, in possessing a quarterly pension from Government sources. 92 was at his old work of gardening as his brother and Owen came towards the cottage, and Owen's quick glance assured him that Ruth had not arrived yet. It was Wednesday afternoon, half-holiday, and there had been plenty of time to reach the cottage from the school, our hero thought a little bitterly. It might be their last meeting, and she might have shown some alacrity under the circumstances. And yet why should she hasten on her way to meet *him*?

"So you're off to forrin' parts, Owen Owen?" said 92, after the usual greeting. "Fortune-hunting and wife-hunting, p'raps, and such like things. Well, you're a young man, and I wish I was you."

92 heaved so deep a sigh, that Dell broke in with his old abruptness:

"Why, what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing much," said 92, evading his brother's eyes, which seemed inclined at that juncture to leap out of their owner's head towards him; "only things *is* a little dull here, and I've been used to active life."

"You're too old for active life," said Dell.

"I'm too old for the service, John, if you mean that," said 92; "I couldn't stand the night work, or a Lower Marsh beat, or anything of that kind. But it's dull work here, always unbuttoned."

John Dell laughed, and 92 resented it.

"You've a hactive mind, John," said he, "and ought to understand my contigimies better. You wouldn't like to be always stuck amongst cabbages that never come to a heart, but run up to seed, or get mildooded—you'd like to be a-stirring."

"It's a life a little monotonous, no doubt."

"Never mind what it is," said 92; "it's what I don't take to a great deal. It's really too much unbuttonment, John, upon my word. If I had the capital I'd go into business, or into partnership with some one who'd do the activity part while I went on with the head-work. See?"

"I see," said John, who was disgusted at the general discontent pervading the species to which he belonged. Yesterday Owen—to-day a brother with gouty feet talking of *change*.

He should be thinking of change himself next. What a world it was !

Owen wandered restlessly about the garden whilst the brothers talked. He had but a couple of hours to spend at this cottage before he went on to break the news to Mary and Mrs. Cutchfield, who, for reasons of his own, had been kept in the dark till the last. Only two hours, and Ruth Dell had not come yet ! He did not care for her now—she was another's, and he had long since given up caring for her—but he would have liked to have seen her and talked to her before that last parting ; it might have been a pleasant retrospect some day—who could tell ?

He walked to the gate and looked anxiously up the road, along which, one moonlight night, he had watched the receding figure of Arthur Glindon. Glindon !—ah ! may the name be accursed ! No, no—God forgive him—he did not mean that ; for there would come a time when Ruth would bear that name—and he wished her every health and happiness.

And as he watched she came down that road—not alone, but with him he felt he hated, and ever should hate. The opposing element leaped within him, and he had made more than one effort to check it, notwithstanding. He did not check it, then, for he had not wished to see the man. He will be a shadow on this final meeting, thought Owen—he will be ever associated with it in my mind. Could she not for once have spared me, spared herself, his company !

When they had entered the garden, and the usual formal bow had taken place between Glindon and our hero, Ruth laid her hand on his arm and led our hero away. It was the first time that she had done so of her own free will, and his heart thrilled.

“You are going away for many years I hear, Owen,” she said ; “I am sorry.”

“Thank you,” responded Owen ; “it is pleasant to hear our old friends express regret at separation.”

“And you are so old a friend—have been a son to my uncle, and a brother to me. For how many years do you think of leaving England ?”

“Six.”

“A long period. Where shall we all be, and what positions shall we occupy, six years hence ? Oh ! dear, what a time it is !” And she sighed, and looked thoughtfully downwards.

Owen watched her narrowly. She was more grave than

ordinary, he thought ; more grave than his coming absence from England warranted. Had she begun to doubt her future that she spoke of six years hence so sorrowfully ?

"I hope to return and find you happy, Ruth—as happy a wife and mother as you deserve to be."

"I know I have your best wishes for my welfare—you will believe that you have mine ?"

"With all my heart."

Owen and Ruth strolled on together alone. 92's garden ground was pretty extensive, and they chose the end paths, away from the Brothers Dell and Mr. Glindon, standing in a group near the cottage, with Mr. Glindon glancing at them now and then from under his hat. Owen had already seen these glances and taken no heed, or rather, on the contrary, taken a little satisfaction to himself in being in Glindon's place, and arousing no small degree of jealous feeling. Anything that pained Glindon must of necessity be a satisfaction to Owen, it seemed—it was the rule governing opposing elements. However, Owen had soon forgotten Glindon's existence in his interest in Ruth Dell, and Ruth was eloquent and earnest that day. He had divined by that time the object of her leading him away from her friends ; and he listened to words that from anyone else in the world he would have closed his ears and heart to.

For Ruth Dell, a fair judge of human nature for one so young and with so little worldly experience—as will be seen as we go further up the stream—had also remarked those principal traits in Owen's character which tended so much to narrow it, and deceive him. They had been children together—sister and brother as she termed it—and her interest in Owen was not small. Moreover, she was a truly religious girl—patient and gentle and self-denying—and she could not let Owen set forth upon his journey without expressing all her concern for his welfare—all her desire to see him a prosperous man and a good Christian. She preached to him without Owen divining it was a sermon—for she was a fair preacher, and earnest in her work. He was touched more at her interest in him than at her exhortation—for he thought she had long since forgotten him and their old friendly relations together.

"If anything will make me a better man, Ruth, it is your words to-day. Your wishes shall be my incentive to exertion when my life has begun across the seas."

She told him how no exertions would profit him without faith in the Giver of all blessings, and besought him, in that new life, to be less stern and have more childlike con-

fidence in God. He listened till his chest heaved and his eyes swam—he felt that she was right and he was wrong—and he promised to do his best, and ever seek to remember her words. He told the whole story of his mother then—of his intentions regarding her—and had scarcely concluded when Mr. Dell advanced towards them and broke the charm which had enwrapped Owen, and made him forget time and place, and the last duties before him.

“Two hours are nearly up, Owen,” said he; “I don’t wish to hurry you, but if you have to see Mary to-night and catch the last train there’s no time to lose.”

“Well, I must begone then,” said Owen with a half sigh.

“You have been here a trifle too long already,” whispered Dell.

“Why?”

“Because you are a dolt and a dreamer, and don’t know what is best for you.”

“It is for the last time in all my life, Dell,” murmured Owen, “and she has been speaking of my welfare—earthly and spiritual. I feel a better man now—stronger in the purpose lying before me.”

“Well, well, she’s a good girl, and you are to be trusted with her; but Mr. Glindon’s not of my opinion.”

“Does he say so?” cried Owen, losing all his pleasurable sensations on the instant.

“He don’t say much, but he looks a deal more,” observed Dell.

“Let him.”

“And I don’t say he hasn’t a right to look so,” added Dell, “not knowing too much of you, and perhaps not judging Ruth as I might. If I were a young man, I should like to knock your head off.”

Owen laughed, as Dell seemed to expect some such return for his facetiæ, but it was a poor effort, and the parting was so near! Owen did not think or care for Glindon much then; he was anxious to abridge a time of trial and pain to him, and the smiles or frowns of the man were equally unimportant.

And yet when he was face-to-face with him—when, as it seemed expected by all of them, he had shaken hands with him, he could not help saying:—

“You are left the best of girls in the world, Sir—may you make her a happy wife.”

“I shall know my duty, Sir,” coldly responded Glindon.

Owen did not answer. It was on his lips to say, “If you

swerve from it, I am her brother and will come back to take her part ;” but he adopted the wiser course of remaining silent, and turned to Ruth and her father, whose hands he could shake more heartily. His parting with John Dell was reserved for the morrow on shipboard.

“A fair journey and a fair future to you, Owen Owen,” said 92 ; “and an old man’s blessing on you, if it’s worth anything.”

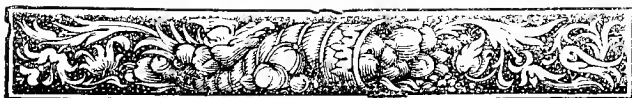
When he had both Ruth’s hands in his, 92 said again :—

“You’ve been brought up together in John Dell’s house—son and daughter to him—kiss her, Owen, as you’ve a right to.”

And Owen, needing no second bidding, kissed her cheek, and Glindon stamped his foot on the garden path as heartily as though our hero were beneath it. He had had enough of this Owen ; he was heartily tired of hearing his name,—the Lord be thanked that he was going on a long journey !

It seemed the beginning of that journey to Owen when he went away that day.





## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE SECOND.

**S**URELY the most bitter parting was over—nothing worse could follow this. He had taken his leave of her for whom he had borne a dreamy, wild passion, and the rest that lay before him would be easy work. There was but a child to console with that night, and an old friend to bid good-bye on the morrow, and then the world before him!—the new life he had planned for himself, and the new heart he had almost promised Ruth Dell. Yes, the worst was over now, thought this sanguine man, as he set forth on that four miles walk to Mrs. Cutchfield's cottage. As if man in his blindness and moral perversity knows what is best or worst at the time he asserts it.

Owen plodded on thoughtfully, revolving in his mind the best method of breaking the news to Mary Chickney. He was a practical man, who had set aside, for the nonce, all the troublous thoughts engendered by the parting with his first love. There would be time enough to think of *that* in the future. There was his ward to consider now, and how to reason and comfort her. He had put off the evil day of his sad communications until the very last. She was a child who would give way and weep, and whom it would be difficult to console; and he desired that she should remain happy as long as it was possible under the circumstances.

It was twilight when he neared the cottage. He could see a light behind the latticed casement, where Mrs. Cutchfield's plants were ranged. He almost hoped that Mary had gone to bed, and only Mrs. Cutchfield remained to hear the news. It would be better after all if Mrs. Cutchfield were the recipient of the tidings, and he could take his farewell of Mary

in her sleep. With this thought he walked the rest of the way to the cottage at a slower pace, and gently tapped at the door, for fear of arousing the peaceful slumbers of the child.

Some one within had been reading aloud, for the voice stopped at the summons, and Owen could hear Mrs. Cutchfield and Mary whispering together.

"I—I really think it's Owen, Mammy Cutchfield!"

"Nonsense, child. Don't he always write first?"

"Not when he wants to surprise us, you know. Oh! please," and some impetuous stamping of small feet rang on the tiled floor, "*do* open the door."

"My dear, there's bad characters about—people off to the hop-picking, and so on. There's no knowing anybody at this time of night. Who's there?"

"Owen," responded our hero.

"I said so! I said so! I said so!" cried Mary, and the feet pattered more than ever on the floor, and there was a great deal of excited scuffling inside, ending in the withdrawal of one rickety bolt, and a rush into the night air of something or some one, that tilted Mrs. Cutchfield's candlestick into the first flower-bed, and left all in total darkness.

"You dreadful child! What a mussy it had been if I had put you to bed half-an-hour ago."

"Oh, gardy dear, I'm so glad you've come to see me!" cried Mary, whose arms were round Owen's neck, and whose feet were off the ground by this time. "I was only talking of you just now, and wondering about you. Wasn't I, Mrs. Cutchfield?"

"Oh! you're always up to something," was the short answer of the old lady, who was groping in the flower-bed to the left of the porch; "I wonder wherever you've knocked that candle to! Here's the candlestick, but wherever the—oh! here it is, and a nice mess you've made of it! A new one set up to-night, Mr. Owen, and now all over grit and muck. And I hope you're well, Sir."

"Thank you—quite well, Mrs. Cutchfield."

"I was afraid something might have happened, Sir."

"Oh, no," replied Owen, huskily.

"I'll get a light in a minute, when I can find the tinder-box," said the old lady, returning to the house. "Step inside, Sir, and mind the chairs—Mary flopped one of 'em over running to the door. I dare say she's bruk it. Mary, don't hang round Mr. Owen's neck like that—you'll choke him!"

"I am so glad to be surprised," said Mary, obeying Mrs.



Cutchfield's orders, and dropping to the ground, "it is so kind of you to come, Owen, and surprises are so nice—aren't they?"

"Sometimes," was the hard response of our hero.

"I think I should always like them," ran on Mary, little thinking of the second surprise that awaited her, "it's better than waiting for anyone, and getting cross and fidgety. Oh, it's so nice, gardy, to think of going up to bed in a minute or two, and then to have you come suddenly in—like a blessing."

Owen laughed, as his little ward, holding his hand between her own, danced at his side. His presence like a blessing to this child, whom he was going to leave—whose greatest pleasure he was about to take away! It was a laughable subject, he thought bitterly. He made no attempt to enter the house, but stood thoughtfully under the porch, with the child at his side. He was endeavouring to think of the best method of breaking the news to Mary, and the effort puzzled and pained him. He had hoped to find her in bed and to have been spared this parting, and even in this his plans were frustrated. Unless—ah! unless he still waited till Mary had gone to her room.

The last thought made his heart more light. He was no coward, but he feared to face the child with the shock of his revelation—surely there would be sorrow enough for her in the future without his striking at her that night! Better to let the days roll on for weeks and months until she wondered at his absence, and then—some friend to break the truth to her, and tell her that he had gone away for years. There was some advice he should have liked to give her—but no matter—he left her in good hands!

He did not know he was even then suggesting doubts by standing there so quietly in the shadow of the vine leaves that ran over the porch, with the gray landscape and the stars a background to his figure.

"Gardy," whispered the child, "there's nothing the matter—is there?"

"To be sure not," said Owen lightly.

"Because you've never come of a dark night before, and you're very quiet now you have come—and—and you've been holding my hands so tight!"

"I'm only waiting here for Mrs. Cutchfield's light," said Owen, "we'll talk enough presently. What a child you are!"

The click-click of the flint and steel had gone on all this time by way of an accompaniment, and Mrs. Cutchfield had knocked her tinder-box, and blew at its contents, and

worried it with a damp match, and rattled away with her steel several times before a result was obtained.

"It's always the way when you've company," she said, in half soliloquy, as the brimstone end of the match ignited at last, "everything going wrong, as a matter of course. I do believe I must take to those new-fangled bits of fireworks after all—and I can't abide 'em, for fear of being burnt in my bed."

Lucifer matches had been in fashion some twenty years then, but they were still "new-fashioned things" to this primitive dame.

"Come in now, Sir," said Mrs. Cutchfield, "and excuse the candle—that's Mary's fault."

Mrs. Cutchfield was picking off the knobs of mould with which it was decorated with the point of her snuffers as Owen entered, and Mary, after a vain attempt to smother her laugh at the picture, broke forth.

"You'd better a been sorry, I think," said Mrs. Cutchfield, grimly regarding her; "there's nothing much to laugh at—is there, Sir?"

"Well, not a great deal; but let her laugh—she's young."

"Ah! but old enough to know better, Sir. She must be growing steady soon, and not flying away helter-skelter out of her skin because there's a knock at the door."

"But you *will* forget that I didn't expect gardy," cried Mary, who was already on Owen's knees; "how could I be quiet after that, do you think? Oh dear, dear," with a little comical sigh, as she leaned her head back on Owen's chest, "how very happy I am now!"

"We won't spoil your happiness by scolding you then, Mary," said Owen; "yours is a sensation that is speedily rid of—eh, Mrs. Cutchfield?"

"Ay, it's a flash-like. And, God bless her, she hasn't been quite well the last two days."

"How's that?" cried Owen quickly.

"I've been trying to learn a little too hard—that's all, gardy," said she, turning round and looking into his face; "because you told me it was so nice to be clever and know everything, and I—I was going a little back in my schooling; and when I grow big enough to take care of you and your house, gardy, and live with you always, I want to be as clever as you, for company's sake."

"Ah! I see."

"And—oh! Owen dear, there *is* something the matter!"

The great black eyes of Mary Chickney had been looking full into the face of her guardian, and a child is quick at ob-

servation. The face was changed since she had seen it last --it was a pale, stern face, and lacked its usual expression--there was something in it new and strange, and the child's heart sank.

"Mrs. Cutchfield,—oh! don't you think something has happened?" appealed Mary to the old lady, before Owen had time to assure her that it was all fancy.

"I don't know, my dear—I hope not," said Mrs. Cutchfield; "there's no bad news, Sir, anywhere, *surely?*"

"Of course not."

Owen answered in too easy and off-hand a manner, and Mary Chickney was not to be baffled. Besides, he was troubled, and was naturally a bad actor. The thoughts in his heart leaped very readily to the surface, and they were sad thoughts, and betrayed him. He was touched by the child's earnestness and affection—and pleasant as it was to think how he was loved and revered, bitter was the thought that he ended it all that night; and in his return—should he ever return—she would have outlived her best thoughts of him. It was life, and the way of the world—his fate was to be friendless and *alone!* And then to add to his dark thoughts was ever the suggestion—bearing on him in that hour with a tenfold pressure—whether he had acted rightly, after all? He had been anxious to leave England, to make his better name and higher fortunes in Australia—a land where names are soon known, and fortunes more quickly made than in England, he had heard—but was he acting well by Mary? Had he considered her sufficiently? Was he keeping his promise to her who had died early—his second and best mother? What would *she* have thought of his step? and what would Tarby think when the letter he had written reached his hands? He had meant all for the best through-out, and Mary would be taken every care of, and he should hear from her and of her very often. In danger he would forfeit all chances, and come back, true to his promise—but in the years of her childhood he would not be much further removed than at present. When she was older, and felt friendless in the world, he would be at her side again, with God's help.

Such thoughts, added to many others, crowded on him that night, and he could not shake them off, or disguise them. To-morrow he would be on ship-board, and it was the last time he might ever hold that dark-haired child to his breast—and she was his little sister, whom he had not believed he had loved so dearly until then.

"Dear gardy, you will tell me everything—your own little

Mary," she pleaded, clasping him round the neck; "I would rather hear everything from you than from Mrs. Cutchfield afterwards. If it's anything sorrowful—such as your going away," she added, with a readiness that made Owen start, "I could bear it so much better if you told me, and be comforted by you—only by you—so much more!"

"Mary, I'll tell you, if you promise me not—not to fret about it and make yourself ill."

Mary in her eagerness would have promised anything just then.

"It is best—and everything happens for the best, Mary."

"Oh! I don't believe it," said Mary, impetuously; "but please tell me the worst now, and get it over."

Mary lay back in his arms, and his arms pressed her closer to him. They were both white faces—guardian and ward's—then. Mrs. Cutchfield, nervous respecting the coming revelation, snuffed the candle with a shaking hand, and then leaned across the table, full of interest. Was something going to happen to her dear child?—was anyone coming to take her away now, she who was nearest her heart?

"I'm going a journey, Mary," said he, trying to render his voice less broken and harsh. Surely this parting was worse than with Ruth Dell—for here was some one who would grieve for him, and require consolation!

"A long journey?" asked Mary.

"Only six years, dear," said Owen, tenderly; "a time that will pass by very quickly, and bring us together again."

"Six years—oh! Owen, darling, it's a lifetime!"

She had promised to be calm, but she was but a child, whose estimation of her own powers was faulty; she was of an excitable nature also, and a breath disturbed her. She was turning round with the intention of burying her face in his chest, and giving way to a passionate outburst of tears, when he held her at arm's length and said,

"You must keep your word, Mary, for my sake and your own. If you cry, I shall not tell you any more."

Mary looked at him through her tears, and fought hard to be calm.

"I—I'll try to be quiet now," she said, and leaned her head back in its old resting-place.

"I'm going abroad, Mary, to work for you and me—here in England it's hard to live as I wish. I have calculated on six years being enough to make a stand in the world; if I should be wrong, still at the end of six years I shall come back to protect you till you have a home of your own."

"Won't my home be yours?"

"Till you are married to some one who is worthy of you."

"I won't have any home but yours—I'll build on that for six years, if you like, and count the days till you come back—Owen, I'll marry you!"

"Thank you," said Owen, smiling through his trouble at the child's ingenuousness; "six years hence you will be of a different opinion."

"Not in sixty, gardy—or in six hundred. I suppose little girls do marry their gardys sometimes—there's nothing against it, in the prayer-book, or catechism, is there?"

"Nothing."

"Lord, bless the child, how it's carrying on, to be sure!" cried Mrs. Cutchfield. "Mary, dear, you don't know what you're talking about. Mr. Owen may bring a wife back with him from forin parts."

"No, no!" cried Mary; "that's not true, is it?"

"No," said Owen, "I think not; but leave to the future the things that will happen in it, and let us talk a little while of what is about to befall us."

"I want to forget that, gardy—oh! do let me forget that," and the tear-filled eyes and the white face returned.

"I am going to Australia, whence I shall write to you every mail, Mary, and expect by every mail that leaves England a letter from you. You must tell me all your little joys and sorrows, and keep nothing back—let me in the stranger's land follow your life step by step. You will keep your whole heart open to me for a little while longer. When I see it closing against me," he added, "I shall be less happy."

"You will never be less happy, then," said Mary.

"You have seen Mr. Dell once or twice, dear," Owen said; "he will come here more often when I am away, and see you and Mrs. Cutchfield in my place. Trust in him, Mary, as you would in me. In any sudden trouble—which I pray may never occur to you—go to him and ask his help. You will see his daughter often, I think—learn to love her, Mary, and to confide in her also. You see, I leave a host of friends behind me."

"Ah, but not one like you!"

"All better, and more able to guide you," answered Owen; "and so trust in them, I say again—even for my sake."

"Very well," said Mary, "I will try hard to love them and make them love me. And in six years I shall see you again—and you don't think six years such a very long time to be away?"

"It is a time that will soon pass," said Owen. "Be patient

and strong. It is a hard parting now, dear, but every week will wear off the impression. In six years you will have made new friends, mixed in new scenes, and I do not expect ever to come back and resume the old post I abandon. Still you must keep a corner in your heart open for me, Mary, and not let silly dreams trouble you."

He was afraid of Mary dwelling on one dream too long—the child had evinced such anxiety to share his home on his return. She was but a child, it is true, but a child that thought much and saw little change—and he had not expected even in her so much evidence of her love for him, and so much pain at losing him.

He did not relate the story of his mother to her—it was a long story, and beyond her comprehension, and that mother was waiting for him at home, and alone. The hour was growing late, he was some distance from London, and there were a few instructions for Mrs. Cutchfield before he departed.

He expressed as much to Mary, who, with a sigh, unclasped her arms from his neck, and slid from his knees.

"I am going to my room now," she said; "I—I shall see you again?"

"Yes."

"You will not leave me without saying good-bye, gardy?" she said; "I'm not such a little child as to be run away from, for fear I should cry too much! I have promised not to cry!" she said proudly, and it was the secret of her strange composure.

"I shall see you again," answered Owen.

"I'm going to find you something for a keepsake," she said—"that will hinder you forgetting your little ward."

She went up stairs to her room, and Owen drew his chair nearer the table, and talked to Mrs. Cutchfield of future necessities; to whom she was to look for her expenses, and how she was to train Mary, and keep her heart young. Mrs. Cutchfield listened, and nodded her head, and thought within herself she did not require one quarter of his instructions, and that she was the best judge—a pardonable idea considering her years. It did not suggest itself to her—and only to Owen when he had been four weeks at sea—that she was a very old woman, and that six years to her might stretch across the boundary separating life from death. They spoke of the interim with confidence—they were both dreamers, recking not of the chances and changes incidental to all years—and they planned little Mary's life out, as if there were no greater planners than themselves.

"That girl's a long time up stairs," remarked Mrs. Cutch-

field, "and very quiet for her. I've allus fancied she was in mischief when so uncommonly still until now. And now it's only in trouble—her greatest!"

"Shall we go up stairs to her?—it's very late."

And Owen looked at his watch.

"I think we will. Tread lightly," said Mrs. Cutchfield; "if she's gone to sleep over it all, it'll do her good, and I wouldn't wake her."

"No—better not."

Owen went up first with the light, and pushed the door of Mary's room gently open.

Mary was kneeling by the bedside, and looked round as he entered. She was very pale, but on her face was calmness, and something more than calmness—something holy and full of faith. Her old protector had reared her well, and taught her in whom to trust, and in her trouble she had sought Him in that darkened room.

"I am praying that we may both be spared to see each other again, Owen," said she, innocently—"praying that you may never forget me—oh, my gardy!"

"God for ever desert me when I do," he cried, catching her up in his arms, and kissing her; "now good-bye, dear, and don't fret at my going away—it's a promise—and God bless you and watch over you. I think *He* will?" turning with an anxious face to the old woman, as if she understood God's ways better than himself, which perhaps she did.

"He watches over little children, and loves them," murmured the old woman.

"He will watch over her," said Owen, confidently, as he let her cling round him still. "Well, where's my keepsake, Mary?"

"I couldn't find anything that would pack nicely," she returned, "or that would keep you thinking of me, except—one of my ringlets. One or two of them."

"Law's a mussy on us, look at the left side of her head!" gasped Mrs. Cutchfield. And sure enough the left side of her head was worth looking at for its novelty—three ringlets having been shorn therefrom, without any regard to future appearances.

"If you had only taken 'em proportionably, child," said Mrs. Cutchfield, whose pride had been in that glossy black hair, "but not have chopped 'em off anyhow, and lopsided your head, like. God bless you, what a naughty girl you are!"

"Here's a parcel of it, Owen," said Mary, tendering a neatly folded packet; "I hope it's—it's not too much."

"No, no. And here's the grim photograph of your gardy,"

said he, putting in her hand a small gold locket ; "it was taken yesterday, my dear. For I am jealous, too, of being forgotten.

"You !" cried the child—"as if it were likely !"

"Well, I hope not," said Owen ; "and now good-bye again."

A shower of kisses between this strange guardian and ward, a shower—heavy and thick—of tears from Mary, and a struggle with Owen to present some degree of firmness, and then he was hurrying down stairs, and making for the garden and the country lane lying beyond.

He would not trust himself to look back until he was on the hill-top where we have before observed him gazing across the dip of land at the cottage wherein Mary had her dwelling-place. In the old spot he paused, and looked across the dark landscape towards the house. The light was in the up stairs window still, the trees were rustling faintly in the night breeze, the peaceful stars were glittering down upon him and his ward.

"Do we know how much we are loved, or how deeply we love ourselves, till tested by such a parting as this?" muttered Owen.

A fair night on which to leave her—calm, and still, and star-lit—God's blessing, as it were, on Mary, whispered by those rustling trees. He could echo it from the heart, and feel confident in her future, and more strong within himself to work for her and that other one whose life was taking a turn, as he thought, for the better.

The soft autumn air brought to his feet some early dead leaves, but he read no moral from them—hopes die every day and fresh blossoms come upon the tree, and life's a mystery !





## CHAPTER IX.

### THE LAST CHANCE.

**T** was nearly midnight when Owen was in London. A change had come over the night since he had left his ward at Eltingham ; the stars had gone in, some gray clouds had begun to sweep across the sky, and a drizzling rain to welcome him as he stepped from the bustling station into the silent, echoing streets. Had he been a man to believe in auguries, he might have thought a change awaiting him.

But his thoughts were still of the past ; the present did not warn him, and the future he thought was marked out, vain dreamer !—all had been planned and prepared in it, and it was the past alone that kept his thoughts pre-occupied as he hurried along towards home. It had been a busy, painful day, and he was glad it was over—that the partings were ended between Ruth and him, between his ward and himself. Much that had been said that day was ringing in his ears still—would vibrate therein for years to come. Words had been spoken that had gone far to change his heart and soften him ; he was less confident in his own strength and knowledge, and more inclined to trust in a higher power than his own. Give him but his mother, now, to bring back to a something more pure than her steps had followed hitherto, and might he not become what John Dell and his niece wished to see him—what his childlike ward, in the simplicity of her heart, believed him ? Was it so bad a world after all ? —and had the shadows fallen on him more darkly than the rest of men ? He had only been a sceptic, and less inclined to meet the ills that fall naturally to all men's share.

Full of such thoughts, he had reached his home in the street leading out of the Kennington Road before he was aware of it. Apartments strangely out of order now, with boxes in the

passage, significant of the great change coming with the morrow. And yet hardly significant of all, even at that hour, with a change so near at hand.

As his mother had promised to sit up for him, Owen was a little surprised to find no light burning in the room—more surprised to find, when he had struck a light and turned on the little gas-burner, that his mother had not gone to bed as he had supposed, but was sitting on the sofa fronting him, with her hands on her knees and a peculiar unfathomable look in her eyes.

“What’s the matter? Why are you sitting in the dark?”

“I have been out shopping, and just come back,” was the answer.

Owen looked more intently at her. It was a short answer, unlike her new manner of replying to him—a dogged answer, that reminded him of old times.

It struck him that her face was different, also—less resignation and more defiance thereon—but perhaps he was nervous.

“A late hour for shopping,” he added quietly, as he took a seat near the empty fire-grate, exactly facing his mother. The position seemed to displease her, his searching looks towards her to worry and excite her.

“I wonder what you are looking like that for?” she muttered. “Do you think I am under a microscope, or can bear it? Isn’t it hard enough as it is?”

“What is?”

“Oh! I don’t know.”

“Do you mean this present life?” demanded Owen, sternly.

“Perhaps I do,” was the reply; “and hard it is, Owen. Day after day hard work, and no thanks—and your face over it all, as cold as a staty’s.”

“What do you expect?”

“Nothing.”

“Do you think I have been unkind to you?”

“N—no,” she replied; “I don’t say you have—I don’t say anything, mind you. I’m not grumbling.”

It was something very like it, and Owen, who had expected a different welcome back, in that last hour of his stay in England, felt annoyed. More than that, he felt disheartened. His mother had been gradually becoming more dull and thoughtful; to-night had rendered her morose—brought back much of her past discontented ways.

“Have you been so good a mother to me in my life, that you should expect much evidence of my affection?” said he. “Cannot you be content with my efforts to render you a

better woman, until the time comes when you can prove your amendment?"

"Well, perhaps I can," she said. "I know you mean well, and that your heart's set on making a good woman of me. P'raps it's all right enough—but what's it to end in? Say I am a good woman some day, I shall be only slaving my life out somewhere—I who always hated work!—as a reward for choosing the narrow path, as the parson says!"

Owen frowned, and his foot beat impatiently on the carpet.

"There you go again!" cried the mother, "with your savage looks, that make one's soul sink. You're a blessed sight more like a magistrate than a son—you always will be! And I know I deserve it," she cried, suddenly taking a turn in a new direction—"that I'm a wicked, ungrateful woman, tempted by the devil to the streets again—the black devil, Owen, that hangs to my skirts, and keeps me down. There's no hope for me—there's no chance!"

The woman burst into a passionate fit of weeping, and began rocking herself in her chair, after the old manner. Owen sat unmoved. There was no genuine emotion in her grief—it was an impulse, born of the gin that she had drunk that night. She would be railing at him a minute hence, or sneering at all those efforts for her regeneration, which he had striven for and failed in. It was a bitter hour with him; and in the first mortification at his mother's relapse, he experienced more anger than pity. He had striven to do his best, and she had eluded his efforts. There lay before him once more all that gigantic task which he had set himself—the beginning once more of the great up-hill effort to link this woman's life with his, and make it different.

"Has any one been here?" he asked.

"John Dell called late, to know if you had come back," said she, wiping her eyes; "p'raps seeing him has dazed me a bit. Ah! that John Dell!—he always gives me a turn that's hard to get over—and an awful turn it has been this time!"

"You give way to trifles," said Owen, peevishly; "every little check in your way is a mountain, before which you sit and moan like a fool."

"Do you know how old I am?" she retorted—"do you think at my age I have all the strength and will that has made you so brave?—do you think that there is so much ahead of *me* that I should care for this life?"

"What life have you enjoyed better than this?" asked Owen, sharply.

"The life where I was not always being watched, and

where——” with a shudder—“such awfully great things were never expected of me. Why, when I was a young woman I never——”

“I’ll have no more of this,” said Owen, starting to his feet—“I will talk with you to-morrow, when you are better able to understand me. Here in England the task to reform becomes wearisome. I will hope against hope in the new world that awaits us.”

The last part of his speech was more of a soliloquy than an address to his mother—a wail, as it were, over the efforts misspent, and the result hitherto of his greatest experiment.

“Will you go to your room now?” he said; “we must rise early to finish our packing.”

“You said about twelve in the morning would be time enough to leave here?”

“There are many things to arrange before twelve.”

“So there is, Owen darling—so there is,” assented his mother, with a spasmodic gasp of affection.

She rose from the sofa, and stood poising herself in an upright position, previous to a start. She might feel a trifle unsteady, and it was necessary to make a good beginning, with those “cat’s eyes” of her son upon her. What the devil had she done, that she should be watched like this!

She set off at last, and came to a full stop by the centre table, on which she leaned her hand for a moment, preparative to starting afresh.

Owen touched her arm at this moment.

“Mother, you have been drinking.”

“No.”

“And you are lying—don’t deceive me.”

“Oh, dear, what a fellow you are!” sighed the woman; “there’s no pleasing you—I give it up—I’ll go and drown myself!”

“You have been drinking,” repeated Owen.

“Only two glasses of gin at the ‘Ship,’” she said, apologetically. “Not both at once—for I was a long while making up my mind to have the second—came quite home first!”

She confessed to the struggle between good and evil within her, and there had been no good once to contend with. But Owen only saw the evil that night, and his heart was closed. He was angry, too, at so poor an end to his efforts.

“You are going back—the struggle has been too much for you, and this is the reaction,” said he, his hand tightening on her arm. “Take care, mother. It depends upon yourself what son I am to be—uncharitable or loving, it is in your

own hands—don't blame me. This is a time of trial for you, and your last chance—throw it away and betray me, and I cast you back to the streets !”

The mother turned of an ashen whiteness beneath his look and words—she shrank from him, and made one feeble attempt to cover her face with her hands, but he held them down with his arm, and went on—

“I will not have your life mixed with mine, if it is to be a disgrace to us both. I will raise you with me, or you shall sink alone. Live honestly and soberly, and I will be a faithful son ; but more of this awful weakness, and I will have no mercy on you. I will raise no hand in your defence again ; I will let you go your own accursed way !”

The woman shrieked, and sank on the floor, as Owen relinquished his grasp and went towards the door. Oh, what a son he was !—cruel and unmerciful ; where was to be the happiness with him ? Better the streets he talked of casting her back to,—better the streets, in whose welcome darkness she could enshroud herself !

Owen felt that he had been too harsh, that he had adopted the wrong method, when he stood at the door looking back on her. It might be necessary to be stern, but she had been in no mood to be talked to then, and he had chosen the wrong time, and only affrighted her. He had spoken of himself and his own anger, and the light he had attempted to show by contrast was dim and murky ; he had spoken of his own mercy, if she repented—never a word, even then, of his God's.

Owen was sorry for his harshness, and went back to her, and tried to raise her from the ground ; but she tore herself from his grasp, and only begged to be left there. She would be better in the morning—she would go to her room in a minute or two, if he would only leave her—if he stayed there by her side, she would scream the house down in a minute more—would he leave her or not ?

“Yes, I will leave you, if you wish it,” said her son ; “if you promise me you will go to your room at once.”

“Yes—yes—at once.”

Owen left her seated on the floor, and went up stairs to his own room, at the door of which he stood, a stern, watchful sentry, listening for a movement. Presently he heard the rustling of her dress, and the shambling of her feet across the narrow landing-place, towards the back room on the same floor. Then the door closed, and all was still.

He was content, then, with the result ; his words had pierced through the gin fumes that had besotted her—they

would abide with her when she awoke in the morning, and teach her penitence and humility. He could but treat her yet as some wild beast he hoped to tame—presently he might show her he was less cold and cruel than she had fancied him. He entered his room, and sat down to think of the morrow and his best course therein—as if he were the ruler over that mysterious to-morrow which wisecracks tell us never comes. And the morrow as we dreamed it, wherein we wished to live, and make fame and fortune—the morrow we planned and strove for and prayed—does it ever come to us pilgrims so happily, that we sit down by the wayside content?

She was thinking of the morrow, too, in that darkened room. She had not thought of a light until she had somewhat noisily closed the door behind her, and lumped herself on the floor, in a position similar to that which she had adopted in the drawing-room, after the last reproaches of her son. He would be quiet now, and not come down to worry her till the morning—*till the morning!* She shuddered as she thought of it; it was an awful prospect that morning, when he would enter with his death's face, and those dark eyes which would go clean through her, and make her feel ready to sink through the floor. He would talk of her moral weakness, and the last chance, and she would be sober then, and every word would stab like a dagger—and yet he would go on stabbing unmercifully. And after all, for what?—to make her live better, show a clean dress and face to the society she hated—render her a servant and a slave—take her to foreign parts, which she did not believe for a moment would agree with her. What *did* it all amount to?—misery! She was to be sober, and think eternally of those many sins which had multiplied upon her since her first step from right—and thinking of them was horror! She had been all her life trying to forget them in drink, and now he took the drink away, because it was more respectable. She didn't care to live respectable—just to please him who, now he was a fine gentleman, wanted a decent mother. He was only thinking of himself—he didn't care *much* about that past life he was so anxious she should escape from! And it wasn't such a miserable life, come to think of it. There was no one but herself to please, and it *was* hard to please two, she had found that out soon enough. She couldn't please two all her life, and the time would come when he would throw her off in her weakness, and then she should be in a foreign place, where there were no old pals to look up—no old haunts to seek refuge in. No, it hadn't been so miserable a life—lots of fun and gin! A rare exciting life, with little to do but

hang about "the publics," and spend the money one had begged, borrowed, or stolen. *He* talk of casting her back to the streets—why, the streets were her natural element, and she could exist there! She was a woman of the streets, and their darkness was congenial. She knew every turn of them, half the faces in them, and to think of it all made her yearn as for home. What if she were more dirty, more an object of suspicion to the law, and a mark of pity for people in white chokers, who were bold enough to venture her way, she was her own mistress, and it was comfortable. She had tried a change, and it had not agreed with her—let her be off. When the worst came to the worst—somehow that unfriendly meeting *did* occur with most of her pals at the last—she could drown herself. There might be a year, two, a dozen between this time and that, and between-whiles she should be having her own way. Let her be off then, silently and cunningly, with her boots in her hand, lest the stairs should creak in her descent, and her breath bated for fear the quick ears of that proud young upstart should hear her—he was awfully sharp, like his mother!

She had unlaced her boots as thought suggested her plan of action; she had risen with them in her hands. An awful figure looming amidst the darkness—the angels who had had hope of her might have wept to see her! The old look, the old evil thoughts—the old figure borne back by the strange, irresistible attraction which sweeps back to the sea so many like unto her. For the one who clings to the rock and holds fast in the storm, how many go down? Can it be a world full of penitents, amidst a crowd of unbelievers, and erring men and women, and good men mistaken in the right way and blundering vainly at reform—have we a right to suppose it?

What would Owen think of her? That he was well rid of his burden, or that he had been too hard upon her—she didn't know—she tried to believe she did not care. Perhaps he would fancy that she had left him because she had no confidence in her own efforts, and that it would be better to leave him to go on alone—ever better without her. If he would only think that now; very likely he would, and she would think so herself—it made going much more easy and excusable.

The door creaked as she opened it, and she cursed it for being noisy and unmanageable; the stairs were not silent beneath her weight, but cracked at inopportune moments, and scared her. She was not quite steady in her gait yet, and it was the gin's turn to be cursed, for a hot, vitriolic mixture,

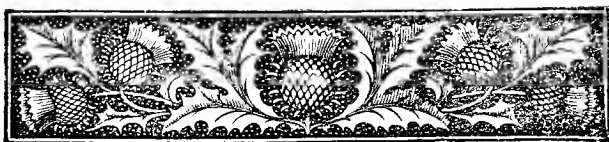
with no real spirit in it. She could remember the time when half a dozen glasses of gin—a dozen—only rendered her a trifle more loquacious, but kept her head as steady as fate's. She was getting out of practice! On the hall mat in the passage, where to her surprise a small candle-lamp was burning—a beacon for an absent lodger who kept late hours. If he should turn the key now, and she should frighten him to death, or make him scream by her appearance there. If Owen, alarmed by any outcry, were to emerge from his room and come down in pursuit of her. Let her hasten away before the thought unnerved her. With Owen was captivity, and in the streets freedom and life.

She stepped into the streets, and left the door ajar behind her. It was raining heavily then, and she huddled her shawl round her and pulled the bonnet over her eyes, and in an instant it was the same world-worn, desolate figure we have seen on Markshire Downs, met in Hannah Street, where Tarby's wife died.

Plodding on in the shadow of the houses went the woman to her dark estate, back of her own free-will to the sin-haunted life from which one upward spring had been fruitlessly made. In the rain and the wind, with her head bent down, and the refractory gray hair already making its escape after the old fashion, she emerged into the Kennington Road, crossed from the "Hercules" Tavern to Oakley Street, turned down Gloucester Street, and plunged into the net-work of courts and alleys that spring thence—dens of poverty, and sin, and ignorance, and all uncleanness, which there is no sweeping away.

Had the seven evil spirits worse than the first met this woman by the way, that she should fling her arms up wildly and cry, "Home!"





## CHAPTER X.

### OUTWARD-BOUND.

**J**OHNNY DELL making his appearance in Owen's room at the hour of nine A.M., was surprised to find our hero sitting thoughtfully at the table, on which were no signs of breakfast, and staring before him at the window-blinds, still left drawn down from the preceding night.

"What! Owen," he exclaimed, "is anything fresh the matter?"

"Can't you guess?"

"Your mother," after a hasty glance round the room—"she was here last night—she hasn't gone?"

"No mother of mine from this moment—I have done with her."

"Has she left you then?"

"Ay—like a coward and a fool, who knew not what was best for her. It was her last chance, and she threw it away."

"Poor woman."

Dell took the first vacant seat by the door, and looked sorrowfully down at his feet. It was a sad termination to both their hopes concerning her.

"You seem more angry than sorry," said Dell, looking suddenly towards Owen, who had maintained the same posture, and forgotten his friend's existence.

"My patience is exhausted with this fruitless end to my labours, Dell," said Owen; "I am sick of England and all in it. It is time I was gone."

"And all in it?" echoed Dell—"thankee for nothing."

"All hopes in it—not old friends, I intended to say."

"You should say what you mean."

"Ah, that's difficult."

He was relapsing into thought, when Dell rose and shook him heartily by the shoulder.

"You want rousing, Owen. This won't do, you know."

"I know that as well as you, Mr. Dell," said Owen gloomily -- "I sha'n't give way—I never have despaired, and I never intend."

"What's to be done about your mother?"

"No mother of mine," repeated Owen, quickly; "that woman who stole from here in the dead of night is no thought of mine now. I have done my best with her, and failed. I warned her last night, and she mocked my warning—it is all over between us."

"How do you know you've done your best?" said Dell, shortly.

"By my conscience, which does not accuse me."

"Perhaps it may some day," was the quiet response.

"I drew the picture last night, Dell, of what she might be—what she was," continued Owen, not heeding his remark—"the son I might be to her, if she lived soberly and honest: I put her case and mine in every light, and she fled from me."

"Ay, you trusted in yourself instead of your Bible, and the end is bitterness," said Dell; "you could not preach to that woman God's mercy—tell her the story of Him who died for us all."

"I was not born to be a preacher," replied Owen.

It was Dell's turn to pay no heed to a remark that might be considered personal. He was too excited and too full of his subject to stop just then, and resent it or remonstrate.

"All your talk was of the world, and she was hardened in it—there was nothing therein that could tempt her. Man, will you never believe there is a better, higher world than this sordid one?"

"In the last I have a living to fight for," said Owen, coolly.

"Ah, you have hardened again," replied Dell—"yesterday I had hopes of you; to-day I despair. You will be ever a man to whom a trouble is an insult, not a reproof."

"All I do turns against me."

"And ever will."

"Dell, you don't want to part bad friends with me?" said Owen—"I can't think that."

"God forbid, my lad."

"Then let us drop this vexatious talk—I'm in no mood to argue—I have been deceived by an ungrateful woman, and my heart is wrung. Will you hear my plans concerning little Mary?"

"Go on."

Owen detailed them, and Dell listened. The reader is aware of them, and we avoid vain repetitions. Suffice it to say that Dell was ready to take any trouble, any commission on himself which he thought would make Owen's mind easy whilst he was absent.

"I hope I have not detained you from business," said Owen, suddenly becoming aware that business had begun at the foundry, "time is more valuable with you than me."

"Not a bit—I'm a free man."

"I don't understand you."

"I left the service five minutes before I entered this room."

"This is sudden."

"Events happen suddenly sometimes—I had a reason for the step."

"May I ask it?"

"No," said Dell, with a fierceness that took Owen aback.

Owen remaining silent after so positive a denial, Dell said in his usual rapid manner,

"Cherbury was early, and I tendered my resignation, which was accepted—what does it matter about the reason? I'm going to set up in business for myself—say that's it."

Owen looked at his watch, and Dell immediately imitated his example.

"Take one hour to reach the docks, and there's one more hour left you. Have you packed?"

"Yes."

"Is that hour a free one?"

"Almost."

"Say quite."

"It is at your service, Dell, in any shape."

"Come with me, then."

He went down stairs and Owen taking up his hat followed him. They closed the street door behind them and went towards the Kennington Road, emerged into that broad thoroughfare, and followed as it were the last night's track of the fallen woman. So closely yet unintentionally, that they were standing in Gloucester Street down which she had turned only a few hours before.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked Owen with a frown.

"Don't say till the hour's over that you give her up—that's not Christian-like or fair. God won't give you up so easily."

Owen felt his lip quiver, and his heart smote him. Dell, who was watching for some sign, brightened at the effect of his words, and passed his arm through his friend's.

"You have told me you were born about here; you must

know her old haunts, make one turn through them with me. Call that her last chance, if you will. It's a poor effort of ours, and will probably end in nothing—still it is your duty. Will you come?"

"You have my promise—I will go anywhere with you," was the evasive answer.

Owen's stubborn spirit would not acknowledge too much—it was a chance, and he would leave to chance his actions in that hour. Time enough to resolve if she crossed their path—for the present the stern countenance and the steeled nerves. Dell, who understood Owen better than he understood himself, led him along, and together they threaded the maze of turnings between Oakley Street and Tower Street—Westminster Road and Waterloo. It was a strange tour in that last hour of his stay; a visit that he had never bargained for, to all the foul home-spots from which he had arisen. The streets were more narrow and dark than in his youth, and in the courts and alleys down which they walked it seemed as if all honesty of purpose and all moral strength to combat the Hydra-headed Crime would ever be inevitably stifled. Men, whose faces were akin to those which had glowered at him in his boyhood, regarded Owen and Dell with evident suspicion; women like his mother watched them—screamed and blasphemed after them—a train of dirty urchins, from four years upwards—reflex of himself in the past days—followed them till they were tired, and then flung stones at them.

"If I ever live to return a rich man," said Owen, "I will have a refuge for the destitute near this place."

"It needs it," was the reply.

It was a solitary walk that Dell had taken our hero—every street had its lesson, spoke to him of the past; of his own life, which, but for one more patient than he, might have been darker than his mother's. Had he met her in that hour he would have essayed again the task of turning her, would have taken her with him to Australia, and tried other, better methods of working her regeneration; he would have done all this, despite his assertion that it was well she had escaped them, when they were slowly, wearily making their way towards Kennington once more.

"It's a biting speech, but it's only from an unruly tongue," said Dell in answer.

"Think so, if you will."

"I wonder what sort of animal you'll turn out in six years, now?" was Dell's next remark.

"Can't you guess?"

"Ah! you're a riddle!—there's no regulating your actions by rule."

"What sort of a man does the world make of one who sets forth to encounter hardships, and fight the stout battle with no friends to back him—one who is resolved to get on, and will devote his whole soul to money-making, to the accumulation of that wealth for which the world will honour him, however vile be his antecedents? What sort of man?"

"A thundering disagreeable one," growled Dell, who hated Owen's acrid vein, and was never more out of temper than when he indulged in it.

"I shall come back a kind of young Cherbury—a man of the world, hard and cold, and uncharitable."

"Cherbury's neither one nor the other; don't speak of him."

"He's no friend of mine," said Owen, "pass him by."

"And you aim at turning up hard and cold, and uncharitable; and talk of it as if such a character would be creditable to any man."

"I don't want any feelings—they're in the way."

"You'll come back an ass if you don't look out. A man who wants to be a model character always falls back into the spoony. You're morbid, and it's a complaint that a good sea sickness may cure. I hope you'll be as sick as a dog! Romantic young men in your mood, would ape one of Byron's heroes—practical men would endeavour to become a machine."

"Do you think I shall get on?"

"Well, yes. You're the right stuff—you've seen life, and can work hard. When brain work's unprofitable you've two mutton fists of your own. Is this your cab?"

"I ordered it at eleven."

"And it's ten minutes past—come on," said Dell. "Begin methodically, Owen. I was never ten minutes out in my life."

Owen's boxes were on the cab, and Owen and Dell were soon afterwards being rattled towards the Docks. Presently they were in the Docks—off which lay the outward-bound ship. A boat took them and the boxes on board, where the captain politely reminded Owen that he had given him more time than any other passenger, that the ship left at four, and no strangers that day were admitted on any account—they would be only in the way, and get hurt in the confusion natural to a ship on the eve of departure.

"Then I'll bid you good-bye now," said Dell, wistfully regarding him.

"Good-bye, old friend—best of friends—true father."

They wrung each other's hands heartily ; but it was not the iron grip of either that brought the tears to the eyes.

"I could preach to you now, much as you hate it," said Dell, with an unnatural hoarse laugh. "It's a parting like this that will bring the sentiment out of a man, if he has any. But I *won't* preach !"

"You'll give me God speed though ?"

"Ay, and God bless you, my boy," ejaculated Dell.

They had parted hands, and Dell, who was turning away, veered precipitately back again.

"Yes, I *will* preach—just for a moment. And I won't take it back again, and break the promise I made my own niece. Here !"

From the depths of his breast pocket he brought forth a small gilt-edged Bible, which he thrust into Owen's hands.

"It's a present from Ruth," said he ; "but I don't want you—she don't—to value it for the giver's sake. Keep it—treasure it for its own. There is no truer friend, kinder adviser, better comforter, than that can be. Turn to it in your trouble, Owen, like a man and a Christian. Don't set it aside now, going the long journey on sea and by land, from the perils of which many thousands will pray for you to-morrow—none more heartily than I, lad. Do think of it a little more, and let God get the better of that proud spirit of yours. It adds to my unhappiness at parting to see it mastering you."

"You are the best of men," murmured Owen. "I shall ever be unworthy of your friendship. Remember whence I sprung."

"See what it says there about that," pointing to the Bible, "it's my answer, Owen."

They were Dell's last words to him as he descended the ship's side into the boat. And Dell's last look was wistful, urgent, and was before him all that long voyage. He felt he was close to Dell's heart, and that he really was unworthy of him—of his great affection and solicitude.

All that long voyage he thought much of him ; he kept the foreground with Mary and Ruth ; the young ward and the dreamy first love, that to a certain extent had helped to change him. In the foreground with them were his thoughts of the new life, and of the energy that was to carry him on successfully, but never the Bible, John Dell's present as much as his niece's. Once or twice he had made a listless effort—for John Dell's sake, not his own—but his heart was strong and self-sufficient, and his interest soon flagged, and farther and further into the background of his thoughts went

the words which, with God's help, would have moulded his character anew. He had only himself to think of just then, and he did not care to pray or read Bibles on his own account. If his mother had been with him, gradually softening in character and becoming more of a true woman and mother, he might have seen God's mercy evident, and been altered thereby !

It was the silent revenge on his mother's defalcation, and he revenged it on himself ! And so, with his heart a strange compound of atoms — full of life, energy, ingratitude, stubbornness, pride, and a hundred other ingredients — the waif was floated away to new lands.

**END OF BOOK THE FOURTH.**

## BOOK V.

RECORDS MANY CHANGES.





## CHAPTER I.

### ONE STEP BACKWARD.



WE have no intention of taking our readers to the Antipodes. If our hero choose to wander away to distant regions it is not our province to follow him, and it may be a matter of doubt if the reader would follow us. For our own part, speaking for the nonce as a reader of novels—whether object-novels, objectless or objectionable we are not compelled to assert—we have a rooted antipathy to travelling afar with the hero; we have our suspicions that his appearance on a foreign soil is a snare and a blind, a check to a novelist's collapse. Once or twice we have found our suspicions misplaced; *more* than once or twice we have been unfortunate enough to see them verified. We object honestly to foreign lands in English novels—a crowd of foreign characters and incidents shot down in the middle of a book we just think we are getting comfortably into. Objecting to these innovations as a reader, as a writer we will be consistent, and leave Owen to his fate. We have not room for his life and adventures beyond the scene wherein this story is laid, and we shut our hearts against the ghost of a new character at this stage of our journey. Owen will be amongst us again by-and-by, and business of importance with those he has left behind will occupy us till his return. His absence, after all, is somewhat convenient at this juncture; it affords us time to look a little deeper into the inner machinery regulating the life and conduct of Arthur Glindon. The absence of one suggests a little attention to the other, perhaps a little enquiry into the nature of that opposing element between the young men, and in which both were inclined to believe.

It is as well to state here that Glindon had no better

opinion of Owen than Owen had of him, and that both were far from good judges. The opposing element was a medium they saw through, and a nice distorted likeness it made of them both. The element was rivalry and jealousy; both were clever and shrewd young men, and both quick enough to see that they were in love with the same woman—a discovery that did not tend to induce any *entente cordiale* between them. Certainly Glindon had come out in the darkest colours, for Glindon was really less of a hero than Owen. He was a more jealous man, and had several objectionable points of character which Owen possessed not. We have already had occasion to note that he was a bad temper—let us see how that dominant, jealous spirit behaved itself after Owen's departure.

To begin with. It was restless that night of Owen's farewells, even before Owen and Ruth had had a long conversation together in 92's garden. It had spoiled Glindon's temper, and rendered him sulky and ridiculous. The young surgeon was a man who entertained a sincere affection for Ruth, and an abhorrence of Owen, his rival—and it was not pleasant on his part to witness so great an interest in Owen's welfare evinced by Ruth Dell, notwithstanding our hero sailed for Australia the following day.

Escorting Ruth from Ansted schoolhouse that evening, the bad side of his character had showed itself too much, and startled her. He was a man who always had some difficulty in disguising his feelings, and that evening they betrayed him.

It was the first sign given of his jealous, almost distrustful, nature. There had been no occasion for its appearance before, or Ruth might have not entertained for so long a period a belief in the thorough excellence of her lover. She had found out that he was a little hasty and irritable—never with her, but with the business of the school and the authorities thereof—but it was a surprise, even a shock, to find him quite an ordinary mortal. Glindon, up to that time, had pretty well disguised his dislike to Owen from Ruth. He had listened to her anecdotes concerning him—what a persevering, earnest young man he was, and how attached to her uncle, who in his turn looked upon him as a son; and though Ruth had detected an indifference to the subject, she had been a witness to no jealousy. She had known, too, that neither Glindon nor Owen understood each other; and the knowledge paining her, she spoke to each of the other's good attributes, in the hope of awakening an interest, and making friends of them. And she failed in her best motives,

although ignorant how utterly, till the mask dropped suddenly from the face of her future husband, in the hour before Owen bade her farewell.

"I am going to have a long talk with Owen this evening," she had said, as they were proceeding down the lane together—"going to try all my persuasive powers on an old friend."

It was a very husky "indeed" that responded to this remark.

"My uncle has been for a long while disturbed about him, he tells me," continued Ruth, after a rapid glance at her lover's grave countenance—"that he is anxious concerning his moral welfare. He thinks Owen is too much for the world, and in his desire to succeed therein will utterly forget greater and better things. Have you observed any change in him?"

"Oh, yes!" said Glindon—"more abrupt in his demeanour, and less wanting in common civility to me—treating me as an enemy rather than a friend."

"Have you made any attempt to render him your friend?"

"No!—why should I? Our tastes and wishes are dissimilar—our positions in life are very different."

"So are mine and yours," said Ruth.

"No, they are not, Ruth," quickly returned Glindon; "we are both servants of one institution, are we not?"

"Have we both risen from small beginnings?"

"My beginnings were small enough, at all events," he said; "in speaking of your friend, Ruth, I did not intend to take any credit to myself for my birth or my antecedents. I contrasted our present positions—perhaps they are not so far apart as I fancied at first. Possibly he will take the lead of me—there is more energy and concentration in the man. There, is not that a fair *amende honorable*?"

"Yes," said Ruth doubtfully, for she liked not the tone of his voice—there was something strange in it.

"Then let me change the subject, Ruth. Frankly, it is a subject distasteful to me."

"But I wish to dwell upon it for a short while longer," said Ruth firmly. "Owen is a valued friend of mine—I have always looked upon him as my brother, and it is more than a little painful to know that our best friends are not appreciated."

"Does it pain you much to know, Ruth, that Mr. Owen does not appreciate me?"

"Very much," was the frank answer.

"Will it pain you more to learn that I am jealous of your interest in this young man," said Glindon hastily, and with a

heightened colour ; “ that knowing his dislike to me, and mine to him—I disguise it not—you set him ever before me as a hero ? ”

“ I do nothing of the kind,” said Ruth, warmly ; “ you forget yourself, Arthur — you are very strange and uncharitable this evening.”

“ I cannot see that Mr. Owen requires so much attention—he is his own master, and has a right to follow his own course. He is a man of ability and energy, I am told—I believe, or he would have never worked his way from a costermonger’s barrow to a clerkship—and men of that kind will either not thank you for your interest in their future, or believe it prompted by a more tender feeling.”

“ Men of Owen’s stamp will not think that.”

“ I am doubtful of the point.”

“ It has been my uncle’s wish that I should say one or two words to Owen ; and pardon me, Mr. Glindon, but I shall obey him.”

“ Oh ! I have no intention of setting my wishes above that of your uncle’s, or considering them anything but secondary to his,” said Glindon, very erect with his head, and very straight in his back.

Ruth Dell’s lip quivered, and her eyes swam with tears, but Glindon, looking straight ahead, did not observe the change in her. It had been a pleasant, equable courtship up to that period—perhaps a little too quiet and stately a piece of love-making, as love-making goes now-a-days—and she had been very happy, and thought Glindon so likewise. And now here was a sudden change over the brightness of the landscape, and the first cloud, no bigger than a hand, rising athwart the blue sky. She had seen a few faults in Arthur Glindon, as he perhaps had in her, but here had arisen one which might shipwreck a life’s happiness. She had been to a certain extent deceived in Glindon after all—she did not know that a woman is ever deceived in the character of the man she loves, for love helps to blind and super-exalt. She only thought it was strange after so long and intimate a relation between them ; but strange things *will* float to the surface to startle one. And in life there is great diversity of character—we may tell a man at a glance ; we may know one for a score of years and be deceived in him then.

Ruth and Glindon proceeded silently the rest of the way together ; Ruth wished to reflect upon every word that Glindon had spoken, and that gentleman, solacing himself with the idea that he had made an impression, left it to work after its own fashion. And if Ruth were deceived in him,

Arthur Glindon was still more blind to the true character of her he had been fortunate enough to win. He had ever seen her quiet, timid and gentle—a true, modest woman, that any man would be proud to possess for a wife and be sure of her value; but he was not aware of her true character, and how closely it resembled John Dell's. He had had no occasion to be a witness thereto, and had therefore very greatly mistaken her. If he had been a little hard that particular evening, why it would prove to Ruth that he had a strong will of his own, and she might as well learn to bow to it at once, and consider him the ruling agent. He had no doubt that Ruth would be almost reserved to Owen after that little expression of his opinion; and if things turned out dull that evening, still it was all for the best, and he was content.

He was not contented—on the contrary, very surprised and indignant—to see Ruth lead Owen aside, and begin that persuasive, almost energetic appeal to the better feelings of our hero, which we know almost attained its object, and which, but for an after-disappointment, that rendered him hard and uncharitable, might have effected lasting good. Glindon was mortified at the result of his lecturing—he believed that Ruth intentionally prolonged the interview to annoy him—he betrayed so much irritability under the ordeal, that John Dell read a great deal of his feelings, and closed the long conference as described in a previous chapter. It was Ruth's defiance to the assertion of his will, and he was baffled and mad with jealousy.

And poor Ruth, whom Owen had noticed as disturbed in thought when they met, had had no intention of defying Glindon—on the contrary, had framed to herself a little scheme to bring Glindon and Owen into closer contiguity that evening; but becoming engrossed with her subject, and carried away by the hope of working a change, had grown enthusiastic and forgetful of time and place. And finally, Owen, by his last words to Glindon, had increased that gentleman's vexatious feelings; and lo! from set-fair to stormy, the hand swerved in an instant.

The storm did not break, however, till Ruth had bidden her uncle and father good-night, and, escorted by Glindon, was two or three hundred yards on her way to the school-house. Then a glance at the troubled face of her lover warned her of the course of her own love taking a turn. From that night, in that hour, suddenly a turn. From the peace and perfect faith in her future and in him, to that lower level common to us all—to the sorrows and anxieties,

and fears which love must be subject to, as well as everything else in the world.

"What is the matter?" was her first quiet and natural enquiry.

"The matter is, that I have been deceived."

"By whom, Arthur?"

"By you."

He was in no mood to soften his words—the curtain had dropped between him and his master-passion—and jealousy has no gentleness, justice, or fair consideration.

Ruth's hand left his arm as though it had been stung like her heart—she accused of deceit, and by him!

"I have been deceived in my estimation of you," he went on; "I fancied if you loved me you would have had respect for my wishes. I believed I might rely upon you to study my wishes a little."

"In how have I offended?" asked Ruth, quietly regarding him. Her look was steady, though her heart was aching with her new surprise. He had so well disguised his passion, that the sudden change had for the moment rendered him a new being by her side—surely it was not to this man that she had pledged her faith, and evinced the wealth of her affection?

"In defying me. In holding a secret conversation for two hours or more with that young, sulky brute, in whom your *sisterly* interest is so strong."

Ruth gasped for breath at this charge. It must be all a dream, not waking life, and she would find herself in the school-house presently; at her desk, and the children's lessons heaped before her, waiting critical examination.

"I don't know whether it is worth while to explain," said Ruth, after a little struggle with her composure; "I will give you an explanation if you wish it, Sir."

"I wish it, Miss Dell."

Terrible side-thrusts these "Sirs," and "Misses," and "Madams," after the "Arthurs," and "Ruths," and "dears," of a few hours since;—your last little tiff with that beloved being of your choice, oh reader! will give you an idea of their force and significance.

"It is a repetition, Sir, and unnecessary, but heat of passion may have rendered things confused."

"I am quite calm—I was never more calm in my life, Miss Dell," and his teeth went half through his lower lip as he spoke, and the pain made him swear, *sotto voce*.

"My brother——"

"Your brother!" he interrupted, angrily.

"My friend Mr. Owen," corrected Ruth, "was in trouble. In that great trouble, when the heart is narrowed to the truths of life, and one is growing a sceptic and a visionary. I had fancied it in my power to say the right word that might move him; my uncle thought so too, and I attempted it. I think I have succeeded, and thinking so, I have no cause to regret the course adopted, or even the anger of Mr. Glindon."

"It was a word that took two hours to say," he muttered.

"There was much to speak of—he was going away for many years, and about to leave a little ward to the care of me and my uncle. There was a story of his own to relate, too; of his own efforts to rescue a poor suffering sinner from the darkness—such a story as might have warmed your heart, even to the man you bear so strange an antipathy to."

"It is more than an antipathy," cried Glindon; "I hate him—I should be glad to learn that the ship he sailed in had gone to the bottom! I am tired of his praises, and, if they could be ended thus, I should not sorrow for his fate."

"Mr. Glindon, I have been deceived in you," said Ruth, and despite all her efforts there was no rendering her voice firm; "you have shown an ungenerous spirit—you have betrayed a passion hardly reconcilable with the actions of a sane man—you have wished evil to one of my best friends, and expressed a want of confidence in me—it is better that we part at once."

"Very well, Madam—if an opinion cannot be calmly expressed without your taking dire offence at it, perhaps it is better," said Glindon, hurriedly. He hardly knew what he was saying—Ruth Dell had resented his words so quickly and effectually, that he had no time for consideration—perhaps it was better, as he had said. He did not know, just then; his head spun round so, and his blood was so far in advance of fever-heat.

"Better to find that we are not fit for each other now, than at a later day," continued Ruth, "to acknowledge at this time that our engagement was a mistake and a folly."

"You are strangely anxious to be free," said Glindon; "so sudden a wish to break asunder the ties that have been formed between us suggests a suspicion——"

"I am above suspicion, Sir," said Ruth, proudly.

"Your pardon—possibly I am hasty—I—I— Ruth, do I understand you," he asked in a hoarse voice, "that you really think the better plan for both is to think no more of each other? After all this while—*you* think so?"

"I do."

"Good-bye, then—" and with an impetuous swirl of his heel he faced about, and went rapidly down-hill, leaving Ruth alone at the school-house gates. Could it be really the waking life, thought Ruth, when she was in her own room, pressing her hands to her aching temples ; had the one romance of her life ended, and was the old prosaic existence to come back again ? Had Glindon really uttered all those cruel words, and betrayed the passion of a child, and been uncharitable, and vindictive and wrong ? What an end to all the fancy-picturing of only a few days ago, and yet how much better for her ! Both had acknowledged it to be so much better : and yet how strange it was to know oneself free, and yet feel weighed down by iron chains. Was it more easy to talk of separation than realise the idea of it ? She had not engaged herself hastily to Glindon, and a hasty severance from his love seemed strange and unnatural. Well, it would take time to become reconciled to the shock—but she was a strong woman, and her mind had been well regulated, and was capable of training itself to anything. After that time all would be well with her—every day would make her silent, undiscoverable sorrow more bearable. She was sure of that.

She was right in her convictions, for her thoughts were not alone of this world ; loving and doing her duty in it, still she had never swerved from those higher duties taught her years ago by her uncle, and her faith was on the rock that abideth. With Owen, a great loss, a great worldly sorrow was a blank to his life-time ; he acknowledged no power beyond his own to give him ease. A wanderer on the desert strewn with his dead hopes, he passed on, famished and weary, caring not for the oasis in the waste, or the well-spring that might give him new strength. Man bereaved, seeks the world and its action—true woman, her Bible and God.





## CHAPTER II.

### A YEAR'S RECORD.

**A**RTHUR GLINDON, after parting with Ruth, went off at a railroad pace, as excited, ungovernable, and dead to passing events as any inmate of Bethlehem hospital. The barriers that restrained his evil tempers had given way, and the flood of angry emotions swept him along unresisting. He strode on like one possessed; he cut at the heads of the nettles in the shadowy hedgerows with his walking-cane; he stopped to stamp his foot angrily on the ground more than once, and to ejaculate a hundred anathemas on Owen, and, when tired with Owen, on himself. He crossed a stile and made for some fields, the path through which was a near cut to Oaklands, and coming close to the house of his friends the Cherburys, he turned back again, and went along field after field once more till his feet were wet with the dew.

The church clock was striking two when he was at his apartments in Ansted town—it had taken five good hours to walk the passion out of him. “When the devil gets the mastery of me, I try to walk him down,” he had once told his friends; and whether the devil were underfoot or not, there was my gentleman, tired and exhausted, letting himself in with a latch-key when all the honest folk of Ansted were slumbering in their beds.

He did not think of his own bed that night, but lighted the candle-lamp and sat himself down on the sofa, and crossed his arms like a stage villain. He was restless, and could not sit there, however—and in a moment or two he was on his feet once more and pacing the room, till the thought occurred to him that his landlady slept in the parlour underneath, now her house was full.

He took a chair, and, for the first time, noticed a letter that had been awaiting his return since last post ; he opened it, read it, passed his hands through his hair, and stared at it again—half in surprise and half vacantly.

“At this very time,” he muttered, more than once, and then folded the letter and put it in his pocket with a fierce downward thrust, as if even his pocket had offended him. From the chair to the sofa he shifted his position once more and before the clock had struck three he was again in the chair, with all the devil out of him at last, and something like contrition fighting its way uppermost. He had been a fool and a madman, and thrown away his best chance in life—severed himself, by his own words, from the only woman who would ever have made him happy. Since his engagement he had been a new man, less dissatisfied with everything and everybody, and feeling more steady, and more like a rational human being. He had not been so ready to take offence, or stand upon the order of his dignity since his knowledge of Ruth—gradually, almost imperceptibly, his love for her had worked a marvellous change in his character. Her patience and gentleness had exercised its influence over him—to how great an extent he did not know till that moment, now the evil fit was burnt out, and the result of it all was staring him in the face.

It had been always so with him—it would be thus till there was an end of him now—he could see the end beyond there very plainly ! In old times he had striven for honours and fame, and, gaining them, had thought them of little worth till Ruth had taught him better—it would be the same again, now he had lost the only prize he had ever cared to treasure. His passion had mastered him, and carried him away from her—there was no sailing up the stream that had borne him so ruthlessly away. He did not know till then how much he had loved her—in the quiet days preceding the disruption he knew that he was happy. There was no consolation in the thought, now, that it was better they had parted—that from natures so utterly dissimilar must arise trouble and anxiety ; the fact that he had lost her became every instant harder to bear.

“You were not equals,” hissed his pride ; but his pride had ever tormented, never comforted him, and he would take no consolation to himself from that source. “She would have honoured any station,” said his common-sense. “She would have altered my whole life,” cried despair.

Change was the one thing absolutely necessary for him, and the letter he had received offered it. He must begone—

he could not enter the school day after day, and meet her looks, and feel he was a stranger to her—that all thought and sympathy between them were entirely cut off. He was impulsive, and the great thought now was to put some hundreds of miles between him and his old love. He would begin immediately—vanish away like a dream-figure.

Glindon opened his desk, and began at once to write his resignation as consulting-surgeon to Ansted school. The board met on the morrow, Saturday, and no time would be lost. He had received another appointment, better and more lucrative ; and he trusted the committee would not offer an objection to his immediate withdrawal. He thought he would write to John Dell after he had signed and sealed his first letter, expressing his regret at the dissolution of the engagement, his love for his niece, and so forth ; but he began one letter after another, and tore them in pieces after the first few lines, and scattered the fragments on the carpet. He gave up that attempt—he was in no proper frame of mind for composition—so he tore up his final sheet of paper, and contributed his last quota to the little snow-storm which had already fallen around him.

“So we are to lose Mr. Glindon’s services, Miss Dell,” said the secretary to Ruth the following day. “He is very anxious to depart, and has already named a successor, whom he thinks will suit us. But the committee will not be treated quite so cavalierly, and he must serve another month with us, however objectionable his post may have suddenly become.”

Ruth heard all with a pale face, and a heart that was unsteady in its movements, albeit she returned a few general remarks, and went to her desk, and to the weary lessons, which she had to endure between that time and one o’clock. She had not altered her mind, like Arthur Glindon ; she was still convinced how much better it was that it had all ended thus, and how unsuitable a husband he would have been for her ; but she was troubled nevertheless. She had not given her best affections away lightly, and they were centred in him still—she was sure of it—even when the knowledge that they were irrevocably parted seemed more firmly established each day. She could wish him in her heart every happiness, and a better wife than she should have made him—she prayed for both when Glindon thought she had wholly forgotten him.

The committee of Ansted school, knowing nothing of this love affair, held firm by their bond, and kept Mr. Glindon to his month’s engagement. Consulting-surgeon to an hospital

in Scotland was a matter of no account to them—the Scotch patients must wait for their clever doctor, and the doctor for his more handsome salary. It was the way of an ungrateful world to forget on the instant past benefits, when something more substantial turned up in its favour.

Glindon, who had become surgeon to Ansted school solely on Ruth's account, chafed at the delay the first week ; but was after that period more reconciled to his position, even sorry that the days were numbered when he should see Ruth no longer. It was a curious sensation to meet her every day, and she so cold and business-like ; it aggravated him at times, and brought on his bad tempers or his morbid fits, both of which he kept to himself, like a wise man.

Ruth had apprised her father and uncle of the change, and 92 had said, "Lord bless me !" and asked no questions ; whilst John Dell had reappeared at Ansted to ask a hundred. Ruth simply told him it had been a quarrel, and both had expressed a wish to separate. She begged him not to press her to relate the details of all that parting—her wound was unhealed, and she owned the subject distressed her.

Dell respected her wishes, and went back to the new business he was planning,—of which more anon. He was sorry for Ruth, for Glindon also. He loved the one and had some respect for the other, as a clever and rising young man—it was odd that a break had occurred so soon after Owen's departure for Australia. He thought, perhaps, Owen was connected with it—that the dark looks of Glindon that night had been followed by words which the spirit of his niece was not likely to brook.

"So serve him right after all, if he doubts her," said John Dell ; "she isn't a romantic girl, and losing a surgeon fellow won't hurt her much."

Such was Dell's opinion, and then he dismissed the subject—love affairs didn't trouble him a great deal now.

But if losing the surgeon did not hurt John Dell's niece, it made her thoughtful beyond her years, and robbed some of the light from her countenance. Her school duties became simply a wearisome round of teaching for a while, and the interest she had taken in them all her life seemed suddenly lost. She would get over it after a while, but the shock to her confidence and love was recent yet, and she was a girl who had never learnt the art of disguisement. Mrs. Cherbury, the only lady in the secret, was the first to detect a difference in Ruth, and the first lady to guess at the cause.

"My dear, you have had a lovers' quarrel with Mr. Glindon," said she, one afternoon, between school hours, in Ruth's

reat parlour, looking on the country road ; "I've been sure of it the last week. Now, do own it, my dear."

"We have expressed some little difference of opinion, and discovered that our ideas on things right and wrong are widely dissimilar—and so, like two rational beings, we have made up our minds to part."

"Part, my dear child !" exclaimed the loquacious dame—"oh, that's the nonsense all sweethearts talk when there's a difference. Poor Cherbury and I made up our minds to part half-a-dozen times before we took each other for better for worse—it's all fussy stuff, my dear."

"I am sorry you don't believe me."

"I wouldn't believe you on any account—I should be too grieved, my dear Miss Ruth, for you're just the young lady that suits me, and I want to see you comfortably settled. You were brought into the world to be comfortably settled—a handsome clever husband was the blessing intended, depend upon it."

Ruth smiled.

"I don't think it will be Mr. Glindon, then."

"But won't you tell me the story?" implored Mrs. Cherbury, passing one fat hand over the other in a fidgety manner ; "I am so fond of a love-story, even when it goes all wrong—and you won't disappoint me? If you won't tell me I shall ask Mr. Glindon."

"Pray, don't do that," said the alarmed Ruth—"he will think that I have been speaking of him—grieving, perhaps, for——"

"Pray, don't be fussy, my dear," said the old lady ; "do you think I would mention you to Mr. Glindon if you did not wish it? It's not like me—I'm a woman of few words, and keep my own counsel. And, oh ! I am so sorry the match has been broken off—if it be really broken, what am I to do? Isaac's left off giving dinner-parties, and talks sometimes of selling the business and going abroad—and if he take me with him, why you will never find a husband for yourself, you're such a poor quiet thing."

Ruth could not forbear a second smile, there was something so genuine in the old lady's manner, and in the midst of much useless verbiage there lurked always the feeling heart of the woman. And one woman can confess to another so much of a love-secret without descending from the sublime to the ridiculous. Ruth did not feel half so much reluctance to conceal her story from this honest dame, as from her Uncle John. A little more pressing on the part of the lady brought forth the story, to which Mrs. Cherbury

listened with rapt attention, and scarcely breathed till the conclusion of the narrative. Since she was a little girl in pinafores, and compelled by her governess to sit painfully mute, she could not remember her tongue remaining so long motionless. She made up for it at the conclusion, however, and expressed her opinion on the matter at some length. Our version is an abridgement, which the indulgent reader will possibly excuse.

"Well, to think that that's all," with her eyes distended with astonishment, "that there's no young woman in the case, no flirtation on anybody's side,—only a little warm discussion, such as you and I might have had, if you were a bad temper, and couldn't put up with my ways. Fifty times poor Cherbury and I were jealous of this young man and that young woman, and said, oh ! ever so many more cruel things, and there we were hankering after each other just the same before the end of the week. It can't be thoroughly broken off?"

"Thoroughly," repeated Ruth.

"Dear me, it's a very uncommon case, and I had no idea Mr. Glindon and you were such a fussy couple. I suppose it's the fine feelings of the two make all the difference."

Such a remark, emanating from another person, would have sounded like polite sarcasm ; but there had been never a mite of acerbity in the good lady's disposition. She had risen from a low sphere—had not been very elaborately finished off by governesses and foreign masters—and had quite a respect for fine feelings if they were not allied to "fussy" ones. Moreover, she was really grieved at the separation between Glindon and Ruth. Match-making was her forte, and this was a young, good-looking couple, whose faith in each other should have lasted all their lives. If, before the gulf widened between them, she could bring them together again, what a triumph for her. She was sure Ruth was unhappy ; and Mr. Glindon, who came once to Oaklands, and whom, more than once, she met in the green lanes—purposely, perhaps, after the relation with which Ruth had favoured her—looked like the ghost of himself, looking about for its own corporeality.

"You must come and spend a quiet evening with me—you are moping yourself," said Mrs. Cherbury to Ruth, a few evenings before Glindon's month expired. "You never have a change now, and it's so necessary, my dear."

"But I am very well, thank you, Mrs. Cherbury !"

"But I know better. Haven't you a pain here?" and the old lady laid her hand on her capacious chest or stomach, **for**

it was difficult to say where the one ended and the other began.

"Not any pain at all, I assure you," said Ruth, laughing.

"Doctors tell us there's nothing like change, and I hope you will come."

Ruth felt inclined to ask if any company were expected, but she had confidence in Mrs. Cherbury not exposing her to the embarrassment of a meeting with *one* mutual friend at least. It was not likely that she would so far help to pain her,—she who knew so well how everything was at an end between her and Arthur Glindon.

But we are all the victims of misplaced confidence in our turn, and Ruth, dreaming not of a snare, was betrayed into visiting Oaklands, where Mr. Glindon and Mr. Isaac Cherbury were spending the evening together, for the sake of a change also.

"Dear me, what a singular coincidence now!" said this old hypocrite, flinging up both hands with affected consternation. "My dear Ruth, you will never believe but what I planned all this?"

And Ruth never did believe anything to the contrary. She could see at a glance that Arthur Glindon was equally as surprised as herself; that he turned white and red, and frowned at Mrs. Cherbury, as if with the hope that his glances would shrivel her to nothingness. Mrs. Cherbury had meant well; but it was a clumsy contrivance to bring the "young people" together. She thought so herself the instant Ruth had entered the drawing-room, and paused at the door, looking in with a troubled expression of countenance. She had meant well, but it was a terrible muddle—she could see that now, although a "change" had been a good excuse to lure Ruth, and Isaac's head a fair apology to bring Glindon to Oaklands.

She might have imagined that Mr. Glindon would see the delicacy of his position, and rise immediately to take his leave in a quiet, easy, off-hand manner that was natural, and put no one out. The first shock over he was himself again, save and except a trifling attempt of his blood to rush to his head, and keep him a bright vermillion; and after a few general remarks to Ruth, such as he had bestowed on sudden meetings with her in the schoolhouse, he shook Cherbury by the hand and departed.

Ruth Dell did not remain above an hour at Oaklands; her first impulse had been to resent Mrs. Cherbury's manoeuvres, for she had never felt more inclined to indulge in the haughty and indignant vein, but that well-meaning lady was so truly sorry for her own weak plans, and sat so confused and peni-

tent for past errors, that the heart of Miss Dell was not hard enough to resent the indignity.

She was glad to be on her way back to the schoolhouse at an early hour, however ; she was poor company that night, and "the change" had done her more harm than good. It was daylight yet when she was on her way home on foot—the offer of Mrs. Cherbury's carriage having been declined, for more reasons than one. A warm evening for an autumn month, with only a few dead leaves flickering here and there to the ground—augury of the bright days coming to an end, and the cruel winter time stealthily on its march towards her.

Turning the bend of the road before the ascent of the hill was commenced, Ruth came face to face with Mr. Glindon.

"Pardon me," he hastened to say, "I did not mean to alarm you. I have only a few words to say, Miss Dell."

"Is there necessity for any between us, Mr. Glindon?"

"I have been waiting an hour to see you," he said, speaking in an excited manner ; "I have been anxious to assure you that our meeting at Oaklands this evening was entirely unpremeditated on my part—that my last thought would have been to insult you by my presence at that house. You will believe that, Miss Dell?"

"I have not believed for an instant that you intended to meet me at Oaklands."

"If I have pained you—"

"You have not pained me, Mr. Glindon ; I have no complaint to urge against you. Pray allow me to conclude this interview."

Ruth drew down her veil with a trembling hand : she had intended to be very calm and lady-like, but Glindon's excitement had unnerved her. She did not know how far he might venture on a strange topic, and she was anxious to be once more alone.

Glindon regarded her wistfully, but allowed her to pass him. Then an impulse not to be resisted—he was ever impulsive—carried him towards her again.

"Miss Dell, I am going away in three days. Before I go, will you allow me to express my regret at the angry words, the unjust words, that severed an engagement on which I had built my hopes of happiness?"

Ruth Dell felt it was necessary to curb all emotion, to press it down by any weight, at any sacrifice just then. Women are capable of strange metamorphoses ; it was the grave schoolmistress of Ansted that calmly surveyed him.

"I am obliged by your doing me justice, Mr. Glindon. I thank you."



"I am going away a miserable man ; will you give me one hope to keep my path straight, my soul from collapsing?"

"You are extravagant, Mr. Glindon—more, you are unmerciful."

"Why unmerciful?"

"To revive a subject that is ended for ever, and can but give pain."

"Not ended for ever, Miss Dell," he cried impetuously ; "for years if you will—but not for ever!"

"Mr. Glindon, what do you expect from me?" said Ruth.

"What am I to understand by this wild manner?"

"I am not vain enough to dream of a renewal of our engagement, Miss Dell," said he ; "I have fallen in your eyes, and a few hasty words will not raise me. But will not future efforts, future deeds, lead the way to some hope?"

"I have lost all confidence," said Ruth, scarcely able to keep back a sigh.

"Then I go away an objectless man. I cast myself on the world, seeking amidst it forgetfulness or ruin, and caring not which."

"For shame, Sir !—for shame !"

Ruth reproved him, but it was in a softened tone. She was a woman, not a machine, and he had been very dear to her once. More, he was a strange man, and she did not know, could not guess, if he still loved her, what the end might be of this wildness. Glindon noticed the change in her tone, and his heart leaped within him. Here might be hope after all—he had grievously offended her, but she might forgive him in time. He became eloquent in his defence—he only begged for one hope in the future.

"Say nothing, promise me nothing, but that you will remain free for one year—I will call that a hope, and live on it."

"I shall never be engaged again, Mr. Glindon," said she ; "the reality of life has begun with me."

She thought so then, and Glindon took it as his answer.

"God bless you—I will live to deserve you yet," he cried, and turned away, leaving Ruth strangely excited and perplexed.

Had she really made a promise, given him hope to win her by his better conduct in the future—what did it all mean?

The subject perplexed her long after Glindon's post in the schoolhouse was filled by a stranger—kept her brain busy during the long winter, the following spring and summer. She neither saw nor heard anything of Glindon during that time, but he did not die out of her thoughts—gradually the last meeting seemed to soften the recollection of their first

quarrel; and though she would confess nothing, she wondered what the end of the year would result in. Early in the autumn she read in the papers of a surprising cure effected by Mr. Glindon, of —— Hospital, Scotland—a cure by a new method—that spoke of a clever man's close application to his profession. And in the autumn time, when the past wrongs were one year old, when absence had, perhaps, made the heart grow fond—who knows?—Glindon re-appeared amidst the Surrey hills, and calmly and earnestly made the tender of his hand once more.

He had kept her memory green during one year of absence—she was still his first thought—he expressed unfeigned sorrow for the past, and, after a little struggle with her feelings, and a little more grave reflection, she re-accepted him. So they were lovers again, and another year's engagement was entered into. Ruth would not hastily risk her happiness by becoming his wife at once. Amidst all the new bright thoughts that had returned to her, there lurked still a latent fear that she had not acted for the best—for one year more he must wait for her.

Taking counsel of John Dell, he had said, abruptly, “What do I know of your sex—what advice can I give to one who don't know her own mind?”—the harshest remark that ever escaped her uncle's lips towards her. But he was worried with his business just then—it was up-hill work; and though he flagged not in the ascent—he never flagged—still it tried his temper at times. Perhaps an old idea had come back to him since the disruption of his niece's engagement, and now it flashed away again to the ether, and was more distant than ever.

So they were lovers again, we repeat, and Mrs. Cherbury *did* manage pretty well to bring about that relationship, judging by the result which this chapter records,



## CHAPTER II.

### MARY.

**A**RTHUR GLINDON went back to Scotland in a happy frame of mind ; his troubles were over, his first love had returned to him. He should never be jealous again, he thought—the prize he had so nearly lost, he would now know how to estimate at its fair value. It was not so comfortable an engagement as the first ; for they were many miles apart, and he could only contrive to see her once or twice in the three months—seldom more often. They corresponded more frequently, and bridged over space that way ; and if circumstances ran a little adverse just then, why there was coming a time when one home would be theirs.

Glindon, in his impetuous manner, had wished to resign his new post of surgeon at the hospital. It was bringing him a fair competence—it was a settled independence, but he was away from her, and he was sure he could find something equally good in London. He did not care for it very much—it was not exactly what he had expected—what did Ruth think of his throwing it up altogether ?

Ruth expressed her thoughts on the subject very firmly. She was sorry to see the old failing, the old dissatisfaction, still a prominent feature in his character. He was energetic in striving for honours, and the honours were little esteemed when attained. It was ever the far-away prize at which he grasped, and in the present there was never content. Would it be the same some day with herself, and had the difficulty of winning her only aroused his desire to conquer her resolves ?

Glindon said “no”—ten thousand times no to such a thought, and remained at the hospital, a living testimony to his own power of settling down.

Whilst the lovers wait and are patient, we can afford to look round and note the progress of other characters whose lives have been linked with our hero's. The business of the piece assures us we must not allow the reader to forget them.

John Dell was trying his fortune his own way, when the engagement was renewed. Three months after Owen's departure he had essayed the experiment; when his niece considered herself once more happy the business was established, and John Dell in deep water. All the sunken rocks lying beyond the harbour of his neat little investment had been cleared by his shrewdness and foresight; and, with health before him, there was little doubt of the success of his venture. His old employer, Mr. Cherbury, had begun like him; hundreds had begun like him since the world began—there is no secret in money-making, if one be steady and have a fair amount of brains in his head. Only a fair amount is necessary; an undue preponderance forces a man to be ambitious of a name; sets him on out-of-the-way paths ending abruptly; deceives and misleads; makes one take credit for being a genius, and renders everything top-heavy. A genius earns the name more often than the money—the world, that will not put a penny in his pocket, will cry out what a clever fellow he is; and the clever fellow so seldom sticks honestly to work like a practical man.

John Dell saw his way, and put his shoulder to the wheel. There was nothing to distract his attention. Mankind had not flattered him. He had never been in the newspapers (he had once written a letter to the *Times* concerning his opinion on Strikes, which letter an unfeeling editor had not considered worthy of insertion); there were no wife and children to assert a claim on his time, attention, and money; his undivided exertions could be turned in any direction; and even if he failed, there was no one to feel the blow save himself. Not that Dell intended failure; on the contrary, success was the object for which he had made up his mind. But disappointment would not have broken his spirit, or altered his character one iota. Riches or poverty would make no difference in honest John Dell.

He began in a small way at the old business of engineering. He rented small premises Southwark way, and started with a few hands—volunteers from Cherbury's works, who would have gone anywhere with the old foreman, and taken no denial from him. Everybody worked with a will, and what a deal can be done in all professions when the will flags not over the first up-hill road! The difficulties were many, but John Dell surmounted them. The premises began to be

enlarged, orders to increase, confidence in Dell's works to become established. It was not an immense firm at the end of two years—it might never be anything like that from which he had so suddenly withdrawn his services ; but it required a hundred and fifty hands constantly employed, and where the staff is large, and work well looked after, the profits flow in like a blessing on good management.

Amidst the pressure of his new employment, Dell forgot not to write regularly to Owen, and pretty regularly in return came back the letters from the wanderer. He was in Melbourne, and in business for himself, also, he said ; he had no reason to complain—he was sticking hard to his work, and saving money thereby—if he made not a fortune, he did not think he should return when the six years were up without a few hundreds in his pocket. He asked many questions concerning his ward, and was referred to Ruth for the best information.

Dell had no more neglected Mary Chickney than he had his letters to Owen ; he saw the child regularly, and settled accounts with Mrs. Cutchfield, whom he thought a trifle too garrulous concerning old Markshire times, and enquired very closely into the religious instruction that Mary was receiving. For he was an old-fashioned man the reader knows, with the good old-fashioned belief that there was nothing like the Bible as the base of education ; the central and great study, the apex to all the accomplishments. Behind the times you see, reader—for those who study the Bible hard now-a-days, try to pick it to pieces, in lieu of pinning their faith to it. It is an age of critics, and we “review” even Isaiah and St. John !

Dell was a man fond of children, and regretted that he could not apply himself more intently to Mary's progress. He was interested in Mary, in her life, and youth, and generous impulses—in her grand belief in Owen, the one object of her childhood's reverence. He entrusted her to his niece's care more especially. Ruth had more time on her hands than he, and could watch her more intently.

“Spare no expense in her education,” wrote Owen ; “she may have to earn her own living some day. I think I shall bring her up as a schoolmistress—an honourable and praiseworthy profession.”

Ruth went to Mrs. Cutchfield's twice a week at least to make enquiries ; and the old lady, who first objected to so much espionage—“as if she didn't-know how to manage the blessed child, and hadn't seen to her education, and found her the best school long ago !”—took finally to Ruth Dell, who had the tact to obtain her own way in a few matters

which she thought necessary, without wounding the feelings of the *gouvernante* in the effort.

"She's a good young lady, that John Dell's niece," she remarked more than once; "but then she comes of a good stock, and that's everything."

Little Mary Chickney of course took readily to Ruth, wished she lived a little nearer Ansted school to be a pupil there, and could not understand why the rules of that establishment would not have admitted her if she had. And would the rules matter so much, or the people who made them be very cross, if Miss Dell were to smuggle her in over the palings? Mary Chickney loved Ruth for herself, her gentle manners, that kind, loving way which she had with children, and more especially with her; but much that tended to promote the affection was Ruth's knowledge of Owen. Ruth knew her dear gardy, who wrote her such long, kind letters from Australia, telling her to keep good and grow up clever for his sake and her own. She had been brought up with Owen, remembered him when he was a little boy, could relate many anecdotes concerning him. And everything and everybody was secondary to the guardian—the love that should have been lavished on a mother, father, sisters, had been concentrated in him, and nothing would ever shake the child's worship. She was never tired of talking of Owen, hearing others speak of him—it was an inexhaustible subject, on which she was always eloquent.

"I wonder you never married him, Miss Dell," said Mary; "I wouldn't have let him grow up without loving me, if I had been always with him, and your age."

"But suppose I thought of marrying some one else, Mary?"

"Yes; but it's funny you should—knowing my dear Owen so well. But you've lost your chance now, and he's coming home to marry me when I'm big enough."

"You must not tell anyone that. It sounds bold, and you are growing a big girl now."

"I'm just thirteen, Miss Dell."

"And thirteen is too young to get that impression on your mind, my dear. It may do you harm," added Ruth, who was a little startled at the child's persistence in the statement; "and give you false views of life. You should look on him as a brother—father—guardian. It would distress him very much to think you were growing up a young woman, with the same impression that as a child was a little jest between you."

"Don't you think he will marry me, then?"

"I cannot think it likely, my dear Mary. You will have the same idea as myself when you are two years older."

Mary looked very grave at this. She could not understand it, or why it was wrong to cherish the thought.

"Perhaps he'll bring a wife home with him, Mary."

"No, he said he would not do that," said she quickly; "he won't love any one better than me out there, I know. And if he comes back, and I can live with him and keep his house, and see him happy, it doesn't matter whether I'm his sister, his wife, or his grandmother, does it?"

"It's a strange subject to dwell upon," answered Ruth; "let us change it. I am going to write to Owen a full account of your progress; will you add a postscript, or write a little letter that you can enclose in my own?"

"I think I should like a little letter all to myself," said Mary, after a moment's reflection; "do you think you will have room for a ringlet?"

"Well, it makes such a mess, Mary."

"A mess!" said Mary disconsolately, not seeing that the observant Ruth had detected the faintest bud of a romantic disposition, and so ruthlessly nipped at it.

"All the loose hairs straggle about so."

"Ah, so they do; and I remember Owen writing to say that he thought he had quite enough now—he has had one with every letter, and he took some away with him in a parcel. I wonder what he's doing—whether he's thinking of me now, and fancying I sha'n't grow up a good girl? As if I shouldn't do that, knowing how much he wishes it."

Ruth wrote her letter in Mrs. Cutchfield's house on a Wednesday afternoon, and Mary sat by her side and concocted her own careful epistle, making one or two enquiries as to matters of spelling as she went on. It was good news Ruth sent to Owen, news of his ward and her moral, intellectual, and physical growth; and in due time Owen very gratefully thanked her for the missive, and sent an especial note to Mary in reply to her epistle,—a note that set Mary wild with delight because he was so well in health, and talked of only four years now instead of six.

Mary Chickney had one more friend—quite a new acquaintance, that had been formed since Owen's departure. Owen had warned her to be careful of new acquaintances, but this one had come with credentials from Miss Dell, and been introduced to her by that pearl of schoolmistresses, or rather had introduced herself by the name of Cherbury, when the grand carriage had brought her and Miss Dell one day from Ansted.

"Four miles each way are too much for you, my dear," Mrs. Cherbury had said to Ruth; "you are lighter than I am, but not so much set, and the horses require a deal of exercise—it's a dreadful weight on my mind those horses, and Isaac always looks cross when he hears I have not been out with them. So pray make use of my carriage, and take me with you to see the little Mary you talk so much about—I'm so very fond of children, you are aware. No denial, Miss Dell, no denial—if you're too proud for the carriage I'll walk with you, and have a fit on the road."

A terrible threat, that resulted in the carriage being ordered, and the lane by the side of Mrs. Cutchfield's house being blocked up for an hour or two.

This was Mrs. Cherbury's first visit, and was the precursor of many more—far more than Mrs. Cutchfield cared about, though she refrained from expressing her opinion, out of respect for the lady who was Miss Dell's friend.

"She do come a might of times too often," said Mrs. Cutchfield to a neighbour of hers as old as herself; "and the beastly sweet things she brings that child in pound parcels would ruin any constitution, if I didn't hide 'em as fast as they came, and make-believe the last but two lot is the last on 'em. A well-meaning lady, and fond enough of my Mary—as who wouldn't be?—but a trifle too often here, Mrs. Philpot."

Mrs. Cherbury was of the same opinion, though she found it a matter of difficulty to keep away; she had been all her life trying to kill time; she was fond of children, and to this one in particular her kind heart had opened. "Here I am again, Mrs. Cutchfield," said she, "there's no keeping away, and I knew you'd excuse me. The horses wanted exercise too, the groom told me, and I'd rather come here than anywhere else whilst Miss Dell's busy. When will Mary be home from school?"

"About twelve, Mum."

Mrs. Cutchfield generally began in a cold, almost a gruff manner, with Mrs. Cherbury, and only softened by degrees beneath the genial manners of her visitor.

"Shall I take the carriage and fetch her home?" suggested Mrs. Cherbury.

"It only stirs up the school, and makes the other children jealous, Mum—but of course it's not the likes of me to hinder you. Not but what a run along the road does more good after school hours."

"So it does, so it does—but don't you fancy she's likely to be run over?"

"There's not much traffic, thank goodness, and she's more



careful than she used to was, Mrs. Cherbury—minds the cross-roads, and keeps to the hedges. A brave girl that dear Mary of mine is, too," said the old woman, becoming more conversational; "to see her steer her way through a heap of bullocks, that'd frighten you and me to death, would do your heart good."

"Oh! dear—and it's market day!—I think I'll go and fetch her."

"She's done it for many years now, Mum—pray sit still and don't fidget yourself."

"I hope I'm not fussy," said Mrs. Cherbury quickly.

"No, Marm, I can't say as how you are," said Mrs. Cutchfield; "a little bit nervous, I should think—that's all."

"It's the great house—and alone in it so much," said Mrs. Cherbury with a sigh; "if I only had a daughter like your Mary. Daughters are a comfort young, and they grow up a comfort to their mothers—but the sons forget us—always."

"Better to have no sons at all, then," said Mrs. Cutchfield, sternly sententious.

"Forget us in their way, you understand," said Mrs. Cherbury; "so much to think of, so few ties at home—the mother such an old-fashioned institution—such a waste of time to sit and converse with! Now, my lad, I believe, loves his mother as well as most lads, and would be very sorry if anything were to happen; give me a fussy funeral, and put a great pile of stonework over me; but he's not a bit domesticated."

Mrs. Cherbury wiped a stray tear from her eyes with a sudden dash of her fat white hand; and Mrs. Cutchfield was a fellow-woman who felt for her, and who excused her innovation for that day. Mrs. Cutchfield quite forgot the superior station of her visitor, likewise—sign of great tact and true lady-like management on Mrs. Cherbury's part—and took a chair by the fuschia-laden window-sill, and entered into her own grievances—her life, marriage, and widowhood—and the one son whom she had had, and who died cutting his teeth.

"So you're better off than I am, Mrs. Cherbury," said Mrs. Cutchfield; "and half a son's better than no son at all—just like half a loaf."

"My dear Mrs. Cutchfield, that's exactly my sentiments."

And the two old ladies jerked their chairs closer together at every moral reflection, until their knees touched. Ah! there's nothing like a wholesome piece of gossip between two elderly females, to afford one an idea of total enjoyment.

When Mary came dancing into the room, she was kissed heartily by each lady in turn. Mary had been running home, and the colour had flushed her cheeks and made her eyes sparkle.

"What a pretty creature she is now!" ejaculated Mrs. Cherbury.

"Lawks, don't go on like that, and spoil the gal," corrected Mrs. Cutchfield; and Mrs. Cherbury, thus called to order, produced a large tin canister of acidulated drops, by way of peace-offering.

Mrs. Cherbury was a designing woman—respect her as we may, and, grievous as it is to record the fact, we must be truthful chroniclers. She had made her appearance in that cottage with the secret motive of carrying Mary home to spend the afternoon with her, but had deferred breaking the news till Mrs. Cutchfield was in the best of tempers, and there was Mary's persuasions to back her own. Then the truth came out slowly, and Mrs. Cutchfield felt sorry that Mrs. Cherbury had taken such a fancy to Mary one instant, and rather glad the next.

"She's a rich lady, and it might be a good thing for Mary," she thought; "and she was too old a woman to be jealous, much less to let jealousy stand in the way of Mary's advancement. But, oh, my dear," she said, when she was putting on Mary's best Sunday frock up stairs, "don't be dazed by a fine house, and love Mammy Cutchfield less than the fine lady who belongs to it. After all these years you won't do that?"

"Never, mammy—never!"

And Mary's arms were round the old woman's neck on the instant.

"Then go, and I hope you'll have a pleasant day—and mind they send you back early—and don't be dazed—and pray don't, for the Lord's sake, eat everything the lady wants you!"

Mary was whisked off in the carriage shortly afterwards, and a rare red letter-day in her recollections was that first visit to Oaklands. The great house, and the great garden where she could lose herself, and the park where there were deer, and the green lawn she could dance on, and the spotted coach-dog with whom she fraternised. Then, not to mention picture-books, and great oil-paintings on the walls, and Mrs. Cherbury anxious to show and give her everything, and the funny silent man, who came in as she was putting on her bonnet to return, and to whom Mrs. Cherbury said, "This is the little girl I was speaking of, Isaac;" and who answered, "What little girl?" and then said, "How do you?—a fine evening, Miss," to her, just as if she were a big woman. Mary had

much to think of that day—a memorable day for her, still more so for the lady who had been kind to her. For the son—or the lad who was only half a son—had come home expressly to have a long talk with his mother, and long talks were quite out of his line, and must bode something singular. Mrs. Cherbury thought so—whether she were right in her surmise let the next chapter prove.





## CHAPTER IV.

### A CHANGE FOR MORE THAN ONE.

**I**SAAC CHERBURY and his mother were prepared thoroughly for a long talk. Isaac had dined in town, therefore there were no preliminaries to get through. Nothing to do but take the easiest chair in the drawing-room, motion to his nervous mother to subside into the opposite seat, and dash at once into his subject. He was a man of few words, and took the straightest, if not the easiest way to an explanation. He had abhorred circumlocution all his life.

"Mother, I have sold the business."

"Bless my soul, Isaac!—whatever made you think of such a thing?"

"My head—it's growing heavier every day."

He was growing more of a hypochondriac his mother thought, although it was scarcely worth while to state so just then. Besides, she wouldn't have hurt her son's feelings for the world.

"I've been told so much about change doing me good, change working such cures in this and that, that I've resolved to try it. The business was in the way, but there was a good price—a very fair price," drawing in his breath, "offered, and a man can make money one way as well as another. Foreigners are always short of money, and pay an extraordinary percentage."

"Go on, my dear lad, go on."

"So I sold the business, and it's off my mind, and still my head aches—damn it!" he muttered in a lower key.

"And what's to be done now? are we to go abroad, and shall I sell this house that your father left me or shall we let it till our return?"

"My arrangements, mother, will not put you out in any way—I'm going alone."

"Oh, dear, dear, dear!" cried the distressed lady.

She had thought there was something dreadful coming by his calling her mother—it was always "Mrs. Cherbury" when nothing was the matter. He called her mother when her husband died—he called her so again now he was going to leave her.

"Shall you be long away, Isaac?" she said, with a great gulp.

"I can't say—five or six years—it depends upon my head, in a great measure."

"Your head in a great measure—dear, dear me, it's very sad!"

Isaac sat with his knees crossed, twiddling his thumbs backwards and forwards; he wished to offer some consolation to his mother—he did not see in what way exactly. He was not an unfeeling man—he was hard to move, and of a Sphinx-like appearance, but he respected his mother, and he knew that his mother loved him. He had a dreamy consciousness that he had never been a good son to her—in the old days he had been wild and inconsiderate; in the present icy existence he had been taciturn, and evinced nothing but a sense of being bored.

"You're quiet—you're so very quiet always," murmured Mrs. Cherbury, by way of half reproach; "you never think of a mother's advice, but do all without her, even to the selling of the business, which was your father's pride. I think—I—I should have liked to have been told of it, even if you had made up your mind. Your poor father never kept me so much in the dark."

"I never thought of it," said Cherbury; "it's a habit of mine to finish any plan before I speak—I've always found it the best. Of course, I meant no offence."

"No, no, my dear child, I know that. You were never bad-hearted. You're only a little strange."

"I had a shock once," he said, "perhaps that accounts for it."

"A shock!" said the wondering mother.

"Yes—it's nothing worth speaking of—and how we are wandering, to be sure! Most unbusiness-like, unmethodical, and so unlike me. So, as I said, mother, I intend to leave England to-morrow."

"To-morrow—oh, you never said so!—you have never thought so, Isaac," said Mrs. Cherbury.

"Didn't I mention to-morrow?—ah! well, I intended. To-

morrow I leave for Paris. I sha'n't put your house much out of order by packing ; one portmanteau of things will suffice."

"What will you do, all alone in a strange land, my dear lad?" said Mrs. Cherbury.

The thought struck him, what he should have done with his mother ; but he kept his thoughts to himself. He had every confidence in his powers to combat the dangers of foreign cities, he assured his mother—that is, he said bluntly, "I'm all right," which signified the same thing.

The long talk was over on his side ; it had been a great exertion, and he was glad he had broken or thumped through the ice, and apprised his mother of the state of affairs. Mrs. Cherbury seemed anxious to sustain the conversation ; to weary him with motherly advice upon matters concerning which she knew nothing—when would she ever understand that he was no longer a young man, but forty-five years of age, or thereabouts?—a cold, calculating man of the world, whose worldly knowledge everybody appeared to respect, save his mother.

He adopted the old ruse of closing his eyes, having previously stated it as his opinion that his head was a little worse than usual, and his mother, well trained to obedience, sat silent and watched him. It was a great trial to her, this going away—this leaving her alone in the world. It would have been different, had there been a dozen children—half a dozen—only one more ! But her first-born, her only son living—one whom she might never see again after the parting had taken place between them. A strange end to all a mother's dreaming she must have thought it that night, remembering her past fancy-sketches of that son, and of what a comfort he was to be in her old age. She wondered how it would have all been if she had been dependent upon him ; if Mr. Cherbury had not left to her sole disposal the house in which she lived, and a fair round sum in Consols, to support the expenses entailed by so large an establishment. Would there not have been more sympathy between them, more concern on his part—might he not have offered then to take her with him ? Was it selfishness or indifference now, that led him to regard so coolly things of such moment to her?—did he ever think that she could not live for ever, and what a desolate death-bed hers might be ? She cried a little to herself behind her laced handkerchief—not too passionately at first, lest she should disturb his slumbers, and he should wake up ill-tempered ; and when her grief began to master her—for a stout woman will sob unpleasantly loud—she repaired to her own room, where no noise could be heard.

Mr. Isaac Cherbury went away the next day in the most quiet manner, shaking hands with his mother, and promising to write now and then when he had time, or there was anything to write about. Mrs. Cherbury could not have complained of any "fuss" in the parting—all the fuss in the matter was on her own side just then ! It was a great blow to her that separation, although Isaac had been seldom at Oaklands, and had always left his mother too much to herself. It had been consolatory to know he could be sent for if she were ill, or that she could seek him out if his head got the better or the worse of him ; and if months passed away without their meeting, still the satisfaction of their contiguity remained. But it was all altered now, and Mrs. Cherbury was alone in the world !

She took to fretting after that close-hearted, lubberly lad of hers, and fretting disagreeing with a constitution naturally intended for sanguinity, drove her to a corner and took her off her feet. "Too much alone," said the doctor to Ruth, who spent every leisure moment at her bedside, "she only requires rallying. Not a great age by any means, and a good constitution to work upon."

When Mrs. Cherbury was down stairs again, she saw more company. Her butterfly neighbours living in the great houses scattered round Ansted came to pay their respects and offer their mock sympathy ; but they seldom stayed more than ten minutes, and seemed always glad to escape from the house. She was a woman without marriageable sons, and never gave dinner parties or *thé dansantes*.

"My doctor has been talking of the seaside this afternoon, Miss Dell," said she, when Ruth had arrived to pay her usual evening visit. "Nice advice for an old woman like me. The sea-side, and not a friend amongst all the fussy crowds that assemble there. I've been thinking what a pity it was that I ever tried to make you Mrs. Glindon. I could have offered you such a nice post as companion. Whatever am I to do when that young surgeon takes you away for good ?"

"I shall come and spend a week or two with you very often," said she ; and "you must return the compliment, and kill time that way."

"Thank you, thank you, my dear—that's a more cheering prospect. What has become of little Mary Chickney ?"

"She's quite well, and very anxious to see you."

"God bless her heart ! is she, though ?" said Mrs. Cherbury, brightening up ; "and I've been afraid to frighten her with my long faces. I will send the carriage for her to-morrow. If anything will do me good it's the sight of that child."

Mrs. Cherbury's carriage was in the lane before nine the next morning, and an earnest message from Mrs. Cherbury to Mrs. Cutchfield, with her love,—which set Mrs. Cutchfield all of a flutter, and made her as proud as a peacock—begging that Mrs. Cutchfield would not object to sacrifice one day of Mary's schooling for a poor old invalid's sake, to whom the society of children was a great boon. Mary went to Oaklands for the second time, saw more to admire and wonder at, took more than ever to the gentle, motherly lady, who had always been so kind. Mary returned home to Mrs. Cutchfield with a second letter, which caused a second disinterment of a pair of tortoiseshell rimmed spectacles from a black worsted pocket.

"What a dreadful lot of writing, to be sure," said Mrs. Cutchfield. "Why don't she send a message? It gives a body such a heap less trouble."

"Shall I read it, mammy?"

"It mayn't be meant for your sharp young eyes. Perhaps you've been misbehaving, and I'm to tell your governess."

Mary laughed. She knew it could not be that—there was no misbehaving oneself at Oaklands. Mrs. Cutchfield read the letter, and then imparted the news.

"She wants me to tea to-morrow."

"You, Mammy Cutchfield?"

"Aint I good company enough for her?" she asked, harshly. "Is it such a wonder?"

"It seemed a little strange," said Mary, "because I don't remember you going to tea more than twice, perhaps, and that at Mrs. Philpot's."

"Strange or not, I know all about it," said Mrs. Cutchfield, taking off her spectacles, and beating a nervous tattoo on the table with them. "It's not so strange but that I read my fine Madam like a book."

"What is it, then?"

"You'll know to-morrow, mayhap."

And Mrs. Cutchfield closed all argument by stalking up stairs to bed.

At three in the following afternoon, much to Mrs. Cutchfield's surprise, and something to her satisfaction, though her countenance presented a Timon of Athens aspect, the carriage arrived for her. Mary was to stay with her governess until she was fetched in the evening, and, therefore, there was no fear concerning her on Mrs. Cutchfield's mind.

Arrived at Oaklands, Mrs. Cutchfield was speedily ushered into the drawing-room, at the open window of which—it was late in the spring-time—Mrs. Cherbury sat. If Mrs. Cutch-



field had arrived in a stern mood, she was speedily melted ; for she said, very heartily,—

“ Oh ! dear, I’m very sorry to see how you’ve altered, Mrs. Cherbury.”

“ I’m getting better now, Mrs. Cutchfield—I was a sight last week.”

“ So you are now, Mum—fallen away like——”

“ Yes, not quite so stout as I was. My son’s gone to live abroad.”

“ So I’ve heard.”

“ And perhaps I fretted because he wouldn’t take me—as if grown-up lads expected to be hampered with their tiresome mothers.”

She gave a little hysterical laugh, which having recovered from, she ordered tea, and a maid to show Mrs. Cutchfield where to put her bonnet—an office declined by that cautious female, who insisted on sitting with it in her lap, as if it were portable property of some value, that might be made off with, if she did not take care.

A friendly gossip over tea, but the one subject that had led to the visit untouched upon, Mrs. Cutchfield felt quite certain. It was coming, when the servants had removed the tray, and the French windows were closed.

“ Your little Mary has no relations, I believe ? ”

“ I believe not, Mum.”

“ Who is this Owen of whom she talks so much ? ”

“ Her guardian—a young man who knew her parents.”

“ Poor ? ”

“ Well, not particularly rich, I should say.”

“ He’s in Australia, Mary tells me.”

“ In Austrayly, as Mary says, Mum. Quite correct.”

“ I wonder whether he would mind—whether you would mind—my offering to adopt that child,” said Mrs. Cherbury, anxiously ; “ I would bring her up as my own daughter, love her as such, and leave her all my money. I want a companion like her for my desolate old age ; she, I think, would learn to love me in return—and I’ve no one to study in the world *but* myself. I think her position in the future would be greatly enhanced by it, Mrs. Cutchfield—I am sure she would be happy here.”

“ It’s a grand chance for her,” said Mrs. Cutchfield, moodily ; “ it isn’t for the likes of me, who loves the very ground she treads upon, to persuade her to say ‘ No.’ It isn’t even the place of one who is paid to take care of her—more, it isn’t right. It’s a grand offer.”

“ Do you wish I had not made it ? ” asked Mrs. Cherbury.

"For her sake, no—for my own, a desolate old woman, too, it's the truth to say 'Yes'—and I never shirked the truth."

"But I have been thinking of you, too—I don't think I am very selfish; people never told me so."

Mrs. Cutchfield waited patiently for further particulars, and the stony expression of visage softened not.

"I don't see why you can't come here also?"

"No," was the short answer.

"Why you cannot at least enter my service, say as lodge-keeper," Mrs. Cherbury hastened to add; "there's a nice little cottage at the entrance-gates, and my visitors won't trouble you much—in fact, you may leave the gates open if you like, or take them off their hinges, which will save the worry of ever shutting them. Mary will not be far from you then, and can see you every day."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Cutchfield, slowly softening; "it's a kind offer of yours as regards me, too—you're a kind woman, I have always heard—I can believe it. But it's not that, exactly."

"Well?"

"Well, Mary loves me, next to her guardian, of anybody in this world—and it's hard to have you step in and buy her from me. For it *is* buying her!"

"No—don't say that. I love the child, but I would not rob you of one scrap of her affection."

"Won't it all go naturally, if you try to make a lady of her?"

"No—I'm sure not."

"If I only thought that—and Mary *is* different from most children," said the woman; "and different or not—to be thought a deal on, or to be quite forgotten—I can't stand in the way of such a rise in life for her. May I ask who else has been consulted in this matter?"

"No one yet."

The old lady seemed gratified at the preference—the first shock over, the prospect did not appear so gloomy.

"There's a good many to consult—I don't know but what some may stand in the way," said Mrs. Cutchfield; "there's John Dell, and there's Mr. Owen. And Mr. Owen's rather hard to manage, I should say. And there's Mary herself."

"We will set about the matter at once—I'll talk to Miss Dell to-morrow, and I'll write to Mr. Owen when I learn his address. You don't know how I've set my heart on having that child to love."

"Yes I do—I understand exactly."

This was the sum and substance of the dialogue between Mrs. Cherbury and Mrs. Cutchfield—the following day Ruth Dell was apprised of it, and John Dell written to.

There was some reflection on the matter ; it naturally required careful consideration and looking at from all sides, but there was no mistaking the advantageous offer, and no doubting what was best for Mary Chickney. Dell was more adverse to the proposition than his niece, and in his interview with Mrs. Cherbury raised a hundred objections, but common sense would come round to the one point, that it was a chance in life seldom offered, and Mary might ever afterwards reproach them for refusing it on her behalf.

Dell thought of the secret of her father, but he would leave that for Owen to communicate or not, as he thought fit. He even made some enquiry concerning Mr. Isaac Cherbury, his late employer, of the old lady, and somewhat startled her by saying, in answer to her statement of his living abroad—

“Then there is nothing to object to.”

Two letters went to Owen by the next mail—there would be many months to wait for an answer, Mrs. Cherbury thought, dolefully—one written by Mrs. Cherbury, the second by John Dell.

Mrs. Cherbury's letter was energetic and persuasive—Dell's laid the facts of the case before Owen as though they were the heads of an argument.

“Mary will be happy—well cared for in the present, well provided for in the future—it is worth your earnest consideration,” wrote Dell ; “I would not let any old thoughts which the name of Cherbury may conjure up, stand between you and Mary's rise in life. I do not offer any advice myself—God alone knows what is best for the girl. I seek only to call your attention to the facts—you are her guardian, and the only one who has a right to decide. Mary has not been spoken to on the matter—let her wait your decision—whatever you tell her, we know she will abide by. Think well of her parentage, and whether it be necessary to inform Mrs. Cherbury.”

Owen's reply came back in due course. Mrs. Cherbury was better then ; sustained by the hope of the young companion she now saw so frequently, her old strength had returned. Owen wrote several letters by that post—the purport of each somewhat similar. From that to Mrs. Cherbury some fragments may be necessary.

In the first place, he thanked her for the offer, very coolly

and briefly, and then referred her to his ward herself, if Mrs. Cherbury remained still of the same mind. He took that opportunity of adding, that had he alone the right to influence the after-life of his ward, he would have declined the offer, but he did not feel justified in incurring so grave a responsibility. He thought possibly it would be better for Mary to decide—he had been assured she would be in good hands—and therefore he left it to her good sense. He had even written to Mary, advising the acceptance of Mrs. Cherbury's offer, he said; weighing the advantages fairly and honestly in the scale, with that which he believed might prove disadvantageous to her.

"You will possess the love of a child that is amiable and affectionate," he concluded; "I alone shall be the loser. Your scheme has altered my own, but it may be questionable whether mine would have made her so happy. And her greatest happiness is of course my one consideration. For the present I remain her guardian—it is a trust I cannot relinquish to any one—I still reserve the right to advise and console when necessity requires it. No one must stand between me and my ward, until she is able to judge for herself. In four years' time I shall see her again."

Owen made no allusion to Mary's parentage; he had carefully studied the question, and arrived at the conclusion that it was better to keep it in the background. For Tarby's sake, he had no right to divulge the secret; for Mary's sake especially, he felt it would be acting unfairly. He did not know Mrs. Cherbury; he had had experience of how soon secrets escape, and he was too well aware of the blessing and comfort Mary would be to one, who offered her a position she would be sure to adorn. For the present, at least, let the secret rest.

Mrs. Cherbury could not exactly make out the letter. It was an epistle that gave her the idea that Owen was a very stiff young man, with an unbendable back—a touch of her own lad! There was satisfaction in knowing there was a consent attached to it, and she hastened with the good news to Miss Dell, and then with Miss Dell to Mrs. Cutchfield, the latter of whom looked pleased and severe by turns, as though some one were pulling a string behind.

"I haven't had such a trial since my old man died," asseverated the old lady.

"And what does Mary think of it?"

"Oh, she's been a-crying, and don't know what to do for the best. I don't think she likes to part with me, and the old cottage, after all," added the old lady, proudly.

"Where is she?"

"Up stairs, reading Owen's letter for about the fiftieth time," said Mrs. Cutchfield. "What a hullabaloo there is when a letter of that young man's comes, surely!"

"He advises her to go."

"Yes, if she can still be true to him as his ward—will obey him, if he requires it, in any case that he really thinks for her good. But here she is."

Mary came down and glanced towards her three friends, and began to cry again.

"You're getting too old to cry now, you little g—g—goose," said Mrs. Cutchfield, digging her own knuckles into her eyes to keep the tears back.

"What shall I do?" she cried. "Why did he leave this resolution to me? Oh! Mrs. Cutchfield, I don't like to leave you—Oh! Mrs. Cherbury, perhaps I shall never love you as you deserve!"

"My dear Mary, I don't feel that——"

"And before all—always—for ever," she cried, "I shall love my gardy best—don't forget that any one—what he says and wishes I must always do!"

"Well, if he wish you away when he returns, it will make no difference in my intentions towards you," said Mrs. Cherbury; "and shall not I have had four years of happiness?"

"And you will not mind me staying too much with Mrs. Cutchfield at the lodge—I shall be true to all my old friends."

"God bless her now!—hear that!" and Mrs. Cutchfield executed a fandango movement in the background.

"I shall mind nothing but your happiness, my dear," said Mrs. Cherbury; "you won't find me at all fussy."

"Then I'll come and be a lady, and have a governess all to myself!"

"That's right—half a dozen, perhaps," said Mrs. Cherbury. "My dear," turning to Miss Dell, triumphantly, "I've caught her!"

And she spoke as exultingly as an Isaac Walton's disciple over a two-pound trout.

So the life of the child born in Hannah Street took another turn, and Mrs. Cherbury went away with her prize. Both were gainers by the compact, matron and maiden—money, and education, and station, in exchange for priceless affection—rooms of empty splendour, to be filled with a bright presence—a desolate woman to be gladdened by a daughter's love.

The wealth of the world *versus* the wealth of the heart. The former, that a false friend, an evil rumour, a wrong step, can always snatch from us ; and the latter, imperishable, and in misfortune ever a comforter. Surely this Mrs. Cherbury, a woman in a thousand, had obtained the best of the bargain.





## CHAPTER V.

"TIME FLIES."

**M**ARY CHICKNEY was installed at Oaklands, and Mrs. Cherbury began a new life. Governesses and music-masters were sent for to perfect Mary's education, and a more liberal amount of pocket-money bestowed upon her than was probably judicious on the part of her new protector. But then Mary was not like other girls—nothing turned her head! A great house, servants to wait on her, an indulgent protector, tended to make the child grateful, not spoil her—and not all the finery in the world would have kept her from her daily visits to Mrs. Cutchfield at the lodge.

Mrs. Cutchfield even thought she came a little too often, and that Mrs. Cherbury might not like it after a while.

"Oh! she will never refuse me anything," said Mary; "I don't think she could be out of temper. And I can't give up Mammy Cutchfield for anybody."

"But if she shouldn't like it, my precious."

"Then we'll go back to the old cottage and wait for Owen's return. I'm only waiting for dear Owen now, remember."

"Perhaps he will wish you to live here."

"What!—for ever and ever!"

"You can't do better, depend upon it."

"Oh! he will never wish that," said Mary, and she was very grave the remainder of the day at the thought.

Time went plodding on after the old fashion at Oaklands; summer followed the spring, and autumn the summer, and six months of life there had rendered the place home to Mary, sunshine to the old lady, who was made to love children and be loved by them. Not an unpleasant destiny, however trivial it may seem to the reader, to whom children

are troublesome little things, that are always in the way. He must be one of the right sort to win a child's love—no sham will go down with the juveniles. If they see the world in one's face too much, they will fly you—it must be something in your looks, or voice, or smile, which will bring them towards you, confident that the heart speaks in addressing them. Depend upon it, my friend, if children are fond of you, there's something of the true metal in your system, let wiser people behind your back say what they may.

Time made the best of friends of Mrs. Cherbury and Mary, who, by the way, deserves a better title than "only a child." Mary was fourteen when the autumn had come round, and if more childlike than most young people of her age in these precocious times, that is no reason we should take an unfair advantage of her. A light, dancing, fairy-like girl, who gave life and animation to the whole house—certainly small for her age—but that made her all the more lovable, Mrs. Cherbury asserted.

Readers well up in novels will be surprised to hear she evinced not a spark of genius, and was not clever in one particular. She only learned her lessons tolerably well, made no rapid improvement in the piano, sketched awfully, and dashed through a copy-book with a rapidity that took the breath out of her governess. "If she were not so anxious to finish everything, Miss Chickney would distinguish herself more," Miss Miffleton the governess asserted: "she's always in such a dreadful hurry to finish. She learns her lessons in half the time I ever knew anybody else, but she don't remember a word of them the next day, and is only anxious to know how long it will take to get to the end. But she's a dear girl, Mrs. Cherbury."

Miss Miffleton was really of that opinion, notwithstanding she knew which side her bread was buttered, and that which would always put Mrs. Cherbury in a flutter of delight. And Mrs. Cherbury was always in a flutter now; here was something not only to love, but to repay her with love in return—she was happier than she had been for many years; and if her lad Isaac had only written to her a trifle more regularly, there would have been nothing to unsettle her mind. She had only received two letters from Isaac, during the six months—one dated Paris, and informing her that he was as well as he ever expected to be; the second St. Petersburg, apprising her of his opinion that he couldn't feel much worse. There was no news in either epistle, but he always promised to write a long letter next time, which was something that pleased his mother, and did not cost him anything.



Late in the autumn Arthur Glindon returned to Surrey ; his term of probation was over, and he emerged upon the scene looking more pale, studious, and steady. No one meeting him at Mrs. Cherbury's with his affianced wife at his side, would have given him credit for so dangerous a temper as was exhibited two years ago at a few hundred yards distance.

"I have conquered all the evil spirits, Ruth," he said, confidently ; "they have vanished away to the depths, and you may trust me."

"Would you be sitting here if I doubted ?"

"We shall be the happiest couple under the sun," said he ; "and under an English sun too, for I am growing very tired of that Scotch hospital."

"Never content, Arthur ; is not a restless spirit a weakness ?"

"It is not restlessness, only ambition," replied Glindon ; "surely it is honourable to try and make a step in advance. I think I shall work up for my M.D., become Doctor Glindon, and pocket five-guinea fees. It would be a fine thing to be a physician, Ruth."

It had been a fine thing once to become head-surgeon of the hospital, Ruth gently hinted ; and his answer was, that he had wished to rise in life for her sake, and the hospital had not realised his expectations. Besides, he was not comfortable ; there was a young man petted too much by the governor and directors, thought very clever, and pushed in his way a little too often—a young fellow who actually wanted to teach *him* at times !

Was this the old jealousy putting forth a shoot in a new direction—the old demon of discontent that, driven from one corner, had squatted down in another, and was leering from under his hand at his victim ? Ruth gravely asked the question, and he coloured and laughed. He jealous now ?—jealous of the members of his profession ?—was it likely ?

He spent his days oscillating between Ansted and London ; he had come from Scotland to be married, and the hour fixed for so momentous a step every day approached nearer. Ruth had resigned her post at Ansted school, and was staying at Mrs. Cherbury's ; she was happy, but it was a grave kind of happiness, peculiar to her who did nothing rashly, and had ever been of a reflective nature. She had promised to be his wife, and she loved him and hoped for the best ; but there would come a doubt at times of how it would end. He was ever eager in pursuit, steadfast and persevering whilst the goal to be reached lay beyond—place all he had

sought at his feet, and he turned to new wishes at once. Might he not some day turn from her and might she not lose the power to keep him straight in his path?

She hoped not, she even believed not, or she would have never become Mrs. Glindon. Hers was an unpoetical mind like her uncle's, and she did not expect to marry a perfect being; a hero who would not have his tempers and his weaknesses. She looked forward to being something of a guide, an adviser, a comforter, as well as a companion; she knew he might wander restlessly from the track—but she believed she would have power, by her love and gentleness and sense of right, to bring him back. He had the abilities to become a great man; she would use her best exertions to aid him in his career, ending not alone in greatness, she prayed, but in an orderly and Christian life.

They were married at Ansted Church, and Mrs. Cherbury gave a quiet wedding breakfast at Oaklands to the parties principally concerned in the match. There were no grand acquaintances asked, only those who had long known the young couple, or were related to them. Grand acquaintances would have gone home to laugh at all this, and say what a medley of people and mixture of caste!—what a quiet bride, and what an odd-looking fellow the bride's father, and what a firm, straight-a-head-looking party the man with the ringing voice, who was called John Dell, seemed to be! "People in trade," grand people would have cried, and shuddered at the stigma, and thanked Heaven they were not as other men were, and had livings to get by selling and buying. It is possible, even—92 being excited and off his guard, morally "unbuttoned," though outwardly braced tight—that the ex-policeman might have talked too much of antecedents, and strewn the drawing-room carpet with defunct "swells," to whom such revelations would have been a little too much.

So only John Dell and 92, and Mary Chickney and Mrs. Cherbury, assisted at the marriage of Arthur Glindon with Ruth Dell—and certainly they were a *melange*. Arthur Glindon's parents, proud and poor people, had they taken the trouble to cross the Channel, would have wondered at Arthur's wife's relations, as they had already wondered at his marrying a schoolmistress,—he who might have done better! But then Arthur had had always a will of his own, and it was too late in the day to offer him anything but congratulations. They expressed a regret that their advanced age would not permit them to undertake the fatigue of a journey to England, hoped Arthur, in his leisure moments, would

visit Germany, and bring Ruth with him, and sent their best wishes for the happiness of man and wife.

And with these best wishes added to those uttered by full hearts at Oaklands, the young couple started on their way in life, and time went stealing on again, and marriages made in heaven and earth—thought of in a third place, perhaps, or what are divorce courts for?—took place every day, and all the hopes and fears belonging to them bore fruit after their kind, and good and evil went round with the world.

How the marriage progressed, whether light and shadow most predominated, this future history will, in its own time, declare. It is enough to say here, that one child was born when their marriage was twelve months old, and christened Arthur after its father, and that its mother was of opinion that it was the most extraordinary child in the world—a singular opinion for a mother, and therefore duly recorded in this place.

Time went on—say year after year, till Mary's sojourn at Oaklands was of four or five years' date, and Owen's letters suddenly ceasing gave hope of his return, true to a past promise. Mary Chickney was in her eighteenth year then, with the "finishing process" reaching a termination, and Nature's finishing process turning her out a bright-faced, animated young lady of the *petit* order—a lovable, amiable, impulsive girl, who had the rare gift of making friends wherever she chose to take a liking herself. In the quiet retreat at Oaklands echoed the cry,—general in the servants' hall as in the drawing-room, round about the village as at the lodge, where Mrs. Cutchfield dwelt, still hale and hearty,—that "there never was such a girl!"

"Why, the place is all sunshine," said the cook to the butler, both old servants of the Cherburys; "what a difference to the time when we had that lump of a man about the house!"

"Ah, he was a stiff 'un!"

"What a man to begin fretting about!" further remarked the cook.

"I should a on'y fretted at his living so long, if I'd been his mother," added the butler; and there was much hilarity among the subordinates at so raucous a speech.

They take us off unmercifully down stairs these necessary evils; even when we think the honour of serving us, and the salaries we give them, have gained their respect.

Isaac Cherbury had favoured his mother with two more letters during those four or five years—both dated from India, where he had ostensibly settled down. He hoped his

mother was well—he wished he was ! Sometimes he fancied he should try England again, and the medical advisers of his own country—he thought no one understood how to manage his head in the East.

John Dell was still hard at work — would be always working hard till his name was struck off the list of toilers and “moilers.” He had never understood what it was to sit still and let the workers go by him—give him a day’s leisure, and he was miserable till his holiday was over.

His business had progressed largely — eight hundred men went in and out at the strokes of his factory bell. John Dell was known to the trade as a practical engineer, a man who turned out his work well, and to the very day on which it had been promised.

Energetic and yet methodical, having a time and place for everything, a keen eye for a flaw, and a good method of drill, he naturally succeeded. He had anticipated success when he first made his venture ; now he was bidding fair to become a rich man. Increase of orders, contracts of magnitude, were perhaps a little too much for one brain. If he could only find a partner, he thought, to share the labour, and work upwards with him—a partner who would not flinch at the wheel—he should have nothing to wish for. If Owen would only keep his word and come back, a little less proud and independent than when he started, now ! And Owen would come back, he had not a doubt of it — though from Owen’s letters he judged that his friend would be a reserved man. Owen had only hinted at progress, and had not thrown much light upon the nature of his business, or the profits it might be bringing him in. Of the present he wrote little—of the future, nothing. Whether he would say more when they were face to face, John Dell doubted.

John Dell doubted if the six years since their parting would have improved Owen ; still, he was not of a morbid disposition, and he hoped for the best.

Dell still lived alone, in his quiet quarters, in the Kennington Road, with a middle-aged housekeeper to attend to his wants. He had thought once or twice of a country villa down the line somewhere, but he was careful of his money, and in no hurry to launch into extravagance. He did not want a great house all to himself—for he was a sociable being when he had time. More than once he had proposed to his brother to give up the cottage at Ansted, and live with him ; but he had had so much bustle in his early life, that his brother’s brisk manner alarmed him.

“You’d worry me, John ; I aint methodical enough,” he

said ; "and now you're growing a rich man, I don't feel exactly grand enough."

"I'm no grander than I ever was, stupid," cried Dell.

"No, but it looks like it, and I'm sure my pottering ways would fidget you. I'm much better here, with my vegetables, than bothering you or Ruth's husband too much. Not but what it's very dull work," he added, with a sigh, "and I'm still thinking of starting a little business."

"I'll set you up in one to-morrow."

"Yes, but you can't set me up with a practical partner, no more than you can find one for yourself."

"What business are you thinking of?"

"Well, I'm blessed if I know, John !"

"I'm blessed if *your* brain isn't softening," commented his uncomplimentary brother.

The fact was, 92 had long since grown tired of the country and ashamed to avow it—discontented, like Glindon, Owen, half the world, with the Present. He was an old man, who had his crotchets ; having formerly been accustomed to moving on people, standing still had long since grown monotonous. He did not know what he wanted exactly ; he was not fit for the police force, he had not a great deal of energy, he didn't want to be a bore to his brother, or a nuisance to his son-in-law ; he was conscious that his slow movements would try John's temper too much—John had often said he hated people creeping about the house—and he had the good sense to know that Arthur Glindon would respect him most at a distance. Glindon had never wounded his feelings by so much as a hint to that effect ; but 92 understood human nature, and could guess what the result would be. Therefore, he only called twice or thrice a-year to see his daughter ; and although he saw his daughter more often, it was for the reason that Ruth came to Ansted.

92 was at work in his garden, when a tall man, in a black coat a trifle too short for him, stopped near the rickety gate and intently watched the process of hoeing. It was a fair spring afternoon, and 92's rheumatism had taken a turn for the better along with the weather. He could hobble more easily along the indifferently-weeded paths, and charge the "wort weed" and groundsel that would come up along with the early peas ; or rather that were troubled with peas shooting up in their midst.

92, intent on his labours, and full of reflection, did not observe the stranger until he had hoed, in a feeble manner, one-half of the bed, and had changed his position, with his face to the gate. 92 stood up to survey the stranger and

straighten his back a bit ; he had expected to see a neighbour, and the gentleman was new to Ansted.

"Good-evening," said the stranger, however.

"Good-evening," responded 92.

"How far do you reckon it to Oaklands, Sir, if I may take the liberty to ask?"

"Not above a mile, I should say."

"Mrs. Cherbury's, isn't it?"

"Cherbury's it be," said 92, "as any one might know in these parts."

"Ah ! I don't belong to these parts."

92 and the last speaker looked steadily at each other again—the last speaker for a moment seemed to flinch a little. 92 could not account for his flinching ; he did not remember the man, who was tall, and round-shouldered, and pock-marked ; and yet he had a dreamy consciousness of having met with him before. Very possibly one he had taken up or moved on in official days ; and yet almost too quiet and steady-looking for that.

"Isn't your name Dell?" was the enquiry.

"Such it is, Sir."

"You were a policeman once—92?"

Certainly one who had cause to remember his number. Yes, 92 it was—what made him remember him?

"Nothing particular," said the man ; "I lived Lambeth way once, and knew your brother by sight—that's all. But I didn't expect to run against you all of a heap, like. How you've altered."

"Since when?"

"Ah ! since a lot of years—more than I care to recollect," was the reply. "How bad the peas look !"

"It's the cussed birds—they eats the tops off," said 92 ; "never knew such birds for peas as there are in these parts. Do you know, I'm trying to bring your face to mind?"

"Try away."

And the man laughed, and leaned against the fence, and stood 92's scrutiny.

"I've seen it, and I aint—pair-of-socksical, eh?"

"Eh?" repeated the stranger, in some bewilderment.

"What people call pair-of-socksical—it is and it isn't. It's a face I know ; but I don't think it was exactly that face when I *did* know it, you see."

"I see."

"And so I give it up."

"Well, it aint the same face," replied the man—"it's altered ;

and years do alter faces, people, and all manner of things. You'll see it again in a couple of hours or so."

"Are you off?"

"Yes, I'm off—good-day, for the present."

"Good-day to you—and a rum customer *you* are," he added, in a lower tone, "and a rummer you've been. A Tower-street customer, possibly."

The stranger, who was a fast walker, was soon up the hill, on the brow of which he paused, remembering he had not enquired of 92 the way to Oaklands. He did not think it worth his while to go back, however; he put one hand in his trousers-pocket, and took his hat off with the other, and then dawdled along at a very leisurely rate. Coming upon a roadside inn a few hundred yards to the right, he veered out of his path, and went beneath a shady clump of trees into the passage, and awoke the landlord from his afternoon nap under the lemon-net. Having enquired the way to Oaklands, and been rewarded with a very surly "To the left—you can't miss it!"—for landlords of public-houses object to enquiries without orders, especially if they are awoken up to answer them—the man went straight out of the house, and set off at a smart pace.

His mode of progression was certainly eccentric, for, after a sudden halt, as if to remonstrate with himself, he adopted the dawdling rate again. Evidently he was a fast walker, whose intention was made up to walk slowly, but whose old habits were a trifle too strong for the intention.

He fell into a pretty equable kind of goose-step after the last remonstrance, till within sight of Oaklands, when he came to a full stop, and looked round for something convenient to set his back against. Finding nothing but hedges, separated from the foot-path by a narrow ditch, he stood in the middle of the road, with his hat still off, gazing before him at the landscape.

A sun-burnt, weather-beaten face, and much lined as well as pock-marked—a face which gave one the idea that its owner had seen trouble, or had suffered a great deal.

The man stood there a considerable time, might have remained there much longer, had not a milkman's horse and cart come rattling down the road. After stepping aside, he held up his hand to attract the attention of the cart's occupant, and said,

"That's Oaklands, isn't it?"

"Yes," said the driver.

"Thank'ee."

A few more steps towards the journey's end, and then the

ditch ending abruptly, and a sloping bank in its place—a fair resting-spot for a man who seemed unsettled in mind. He put his hat on, and leaned against the bank, keeping his eyes towards Oaklands, and pulling up little shreds of grass, which he let drop through his restless fingers.

If the stranger's mission closed at Oaklands, what kept him without the pale of the journey's end, idling time on the hedge-banks? Was the past a weight with him, or was the present difficult to face?—or was he, after all, nothing but a way-side loiterer, inclined to take his time and enjoy the landscape that lay before him?

He was in no hurry now, whatever he might have been; the stable clock at Oaklands chimed the half-hour past four, struck five, chimed the half-hour past five, and still he sat there, watching the white house amidst the distant trees, and plucking the grass with a nervous hand.

"No, this won't do," he said at last, and giving an extra tug to his hat, which brought it very low over his forehead, he jumped to his feet and walked on rapidly. He would not falter now, lest his heart should falter with him; he had come a long journey, and it must not end in nothing, and he go back like a fool.

He was at the lodge-gates, which were open—there was a bell ready to his hand, but the hand felt like lead, and refused to be raised. He might have turned away even then, if an old woman had not made her appearance from the lodge and confronted him.

"Do you want any one here, young man?"

The gentleman addressed was not young enough to deserve the cognomen, but anything under sixty was gay youth to Mrs. Cutchfield.

She had seen eighty odd summers, and was getting old herself now,—but she did not think the world was becoming old with her.

"Yes," said the man, hoarsely.

"What's your business, may I ask?"

"I've—I've brought a message to a lady who lives here—a young lady."

"Miss Chickney?"

The man nodded.

"Lord bless us, what a man to stare!" was the inward comment of Mrs. Cutchfield. "Well, what's the message? You may trust me with it, for, old as I am, I've an excellent memory."

"I was to give it to her myself."

"Oh, it's something important, then?"



"Yes."

"Nothing to frighten her, I hope, my good man?" asked the alarmed Mrs. Cutchfield.

"Oh, no—nothink at all."

"Will you wait in the lodge, or go up to the house? Miss Chickney isn't at home at present."

"Will she be long, do you think?"

"I don't think she will—I can't say exactly."

"I'll—I'll step into the lodge, please."

Mrs. Cutchfield led the way into the neatly-furnished lodge, and placed a chair for the new-comer. Whether by accident or design, the chair was placed full in the light, a position that the stranger appeared to object to, for he backed the chair against the wall, and sat down, nursing his hat. Mrs. Cutchfield had been interrupted in her tea when the stranger at the gates had attracted her attention, and she proceeded to pour out her second cup after the gentleman had placed his chair to his mind.

Very grave and thoughtful was Mrs. Cutchfield over that second cup of tea—the coming of the man perplexed her. There was nothing remarkable in a person bringing a message to Miss Chickney—it might be from the town and the tradesfolk—but the man had said it was a matter of importance, and the statement kept her inwardly fidgety. And then there was something in the man that puzzled her—he was not from Ansted, for she knew every one in the town—he looked like a man who had been burnt a little in foreign parts, or at all events had had a deal of knocking about in the sun somewhere. He was so silent a man, too, and hardly seemed to be composed enough for one who had only a message to deliver to her Mary. Perhaps if she bribed him with a cup of tea—he looked thirsty—he would become more communicative, and, oh, dear! she felt so dreadfully curious-like!

"Will you have a cup of tea, Sir?"

"Thankee, Ma'am—thankee," said the stranger; "I don't know but what it might do me a little good."

"A'nt you well?"

"Oh! I'm well enough," was the brisk answer.

"Your message hasn't been a heavy one to bring here," with a shrewd look at him out of one eye.

"N—no," was the reply; "I said not."

The cup of tea was held towards her visitor, who rose, thanked her once more, and took the tea back with him to the shadowy place wherein he had ensconced himself.

"I just hinted it, because a bad message to Mary Chick-

ney might upset her mind—it's hard not to be prepared for anything."

"You're right."

"She's a tender-hearted girl, and hasn't been used to bad news."

"And I haven't brought any."

"Oh!"

The stranger blew and stirred at his tea till fully convinced of a lower rate of temperature, then he took the beverage off at a gulp—castor-oil fashion.

"I suppose you know Miss Chickney by sight, young man?"

"Well—let me see now—"

Mrs. Cutchfield had not supposed anything of the kind, but she was becoming more anxious to draw out her guest. She waited for the result of the man's mental reflection very patiently. No, he didn't think he knew Miss Chickney—he was a stranger to these parts.

"You're from forrin parts, then?"

"I'm from London."

"Then you can't know anything of Miss Chickney, who hasn't seen London since she was a very little girl."

"I think I saw her once about these parts—a tall girl with brown hair."

The stranger was drawing Mrs. Cutchfield out in his turn, and that lady, less on her guard, dashed into the subject at once.

"You're very wrong there—her hair's as black as jet, and she's a little mite of a thing for a young woman—light as a fairy, and such sperrits, and so good-hearted! Lord bless you, Sir, nothing would ever turn that girl's heart from old friends—she's full of true feeling and real love for everything and everybody. She's cut out for an angel, and I've allus got the fear that she'll be whisked away when none of us expect it."

"Aint her health good?" asked the man, quickly

"She never knew a day's illness in her life—she's been blessed as yet, as well as she has been a blessing. She fits any station, and becomes it, Lord love her heart, she does!"

"I suppose she looks as if she had been born a lady?"

"How do you know she hasn't?" sharply enquired Mrs. Cutchfield.

The man looked confused, and passed one large brown hand over his forehead, as if sweeping back the short hair that had not intruded thereon.

"It's the talk about—there's no secret in it."

"N—no," said Mrs. Cutchfield, keeping a dubious eye on the man still; "but I didn't think it had got to London."

"Couldn't I hear it coming along?"

"Yes, you might; people do cackle about here awful. Have another cup of tea, young man?"

"No, thankee."

"Then pass over the cup and saucer, please; you'll fidget with it till you break it. Look as if she'd been born a lady!" repeated Mrs. Cutchfield; "of course she does—of course she would. I knew she would when they took her away from me, who had the rearing of her from the tiniest prettiest child you ever clapped your eyes on. And I never lost that child's love, Sir," she cried proudly; "the great house made no change in her, and it never will, however long I'm spared to see her."

Voluble and ancient ladies who have a pet subject to discourse upon, are not always pleasant company, but this messenger thought otherwise. He had changed his easy position with his back to the wall, and sat leaning forward with a hand on each knee, all attention. He scarcely breathed for fear the old lady should stop short in her discourse, and break the spell that was on her, and that seemed to rest on him, and take him from the outer world wherein he must have experienced much hardship. Had he known more of Mrs. Cutchfield, he might have felt perfectly easy on the score of interruption: she would have run on for hours concerning the merits of little Mary, time could scarcely abate her eloquence, or put an end to her anecdotes. Bless her with a patient listener, and give her a quiet evening after tea, with nothing on her mind but the tea-things, which she could "wash up" and talk over, and "how she could go on about that girl!"

"But here she comes!"

And the old lady, quick of hearing, and not slow in her movements, ran to the lodge-door. The man kept his place, and laid his head back once more against the wall. Mrs. Cutchfield thought him a person very short of breath—a lazy person, too, who wanted waiting on, and stuck close enough to the chair, goodness knows, and didn't seem inclined to show much civility by rising.

He had risen, however, before Mary came into the lodge, and was standing twisting his hat round in his hands.

"Here's a man brought a message to you, Mary."

"Oh! I hope it's a nice one!"

"He's waiting in the lodge."

The rustle of a light muslin dress, and then Mary Chick-

ney, in the lodge parlour close to the man who regarded her so curiously.

"You bring me bad news?" she exclaimed. "Don't keep it back. Let me know the worst!"

"No bad news," he said very huskily; "don't distress yourself, it's quite contrary."

"It's about Owen—Mr. Owen of Melbourne?" she said eagerly.

"Yes, Miss, it's about him."

"Well, well, well! What does he say?—have you brought a letter from my dear guardian? What a big, awkward snail you are, Sir!"

"Beg pardon," stammered the man, "no, it's not a letter, only a message—if I was coming this way, just to call and say that he was on his journey home."

"I know that—he wrote to tell me that," cried Mary; "but you're very kind to come and tell me, Sir. It's the good news over again," she added, clapping her hands; "and dear Owen thought he'd make quite sure. You're very kind, Sir, to come all this way, you're—where's my purse?—I wonder where my purse is?"

"Don't be in such a flurry, Mary dear—what a girl you are!" said Mrs. Cutchfield.

"Don't give me money, please," said the man; "I don't want it—aint short of it."

There was something in the man's voice that checked Mary in her search for her purse; an offer of money he seemed to imply would be an insult to him. A strange man, not badly dressed, and yet one whom nobody would have taken for a gentleman.

"I beg pardon. And oh! Sir, do you know my Owen? Did you know him in Australia?"

"I have known him many years, Miss."

"How's he looking?—sit down and tell me all about him. Has he altered much in six years? *Do* sit down!" urged the impetuous Mary.

"I haven't seen him for some time," said the man; "he wrote to me—that's all."

"What's your name?"

"Miss?"

"What's your name?—you're a friend of Owen's—I should like to know your name."

"Van—Van Demon," said the man with a dash.

"What a funny name!" ejaculated Mrs. Cutchfield; "I thought you weren't English by your manners, long ago."

"No, Marm—exactly," said he; "and I'll go now if you

please, Miss Chickney—and God bless you here and afterwards!—and my head aches, and I must have fresh air”

He reeled slightly in his walk as he made for the lodge door—standing against it, he held by the door-post for a moment and looked back. “What a strange, wild looking man!” thought Mary; “and why does he stare at me so hard?”

She trembled even a little, and glanced at Mrs. Cutchfield enquiringly. Had the man been drinking on his way to Oaklands she wondered, that he should give her his blessing, and then regard her so strangely?

“Good-evening,” she said.

“Good-evening;” and the man turned, went down the one step into the gravelled carriage road, gave one hasty glance back as he passed through the lodge gates, and then strode away at a great pace. There was no dilatoriness in his progress now—he marched on rapidly, with his head a little bent. The sun was going down behind the hills—workmen from the town, and field labourers, were wending their way along the road—up from the east the twilight and the stars were coming.

“Well, I’ve seen her,” he muttered; “just for once and all, I’ve seen her, thank God! After all these years, how precious odd it seems!”

A man met him, walking as fast as he—went rapidly past—stopped. The messenger, deep in thought, and with head still bent, continued his way. He who had stopped, turned, and went as rapidly back again, seizing the thoughtful man by the arm.

“Stop!—surely I know you? Fourteen years ago you were a friend of mine.”

The men looked each other in the face. The messenger saw before him a man as tall as himself—a dark-haired, dark-skinned man, with eyes that seemed to pierce him through. Fourteen years ago it was the face of a child, and he had seen it last through a prison grating.

“*Owen!*” he cried.

“*Tarby!*”



## CHAPTER VI.

### THE NEW TARBY.

**T**HE hands of the two men, separated for so long, met as in an iron grip, and for a few moments they were silent. It was a strange meeting—it was opening a whole grave of recollections, bridging over all the trials and troubles between fourteen years and then. It was the world of Hannah Street again and the greengrocer's shop at the corner, and the faithful, honest woman, whom God had taken away from them, flitting about again with little Mary in her arms. Was it fourteen years ago, since the one was a small shopkeeper, and the other a lad fitfully snatching at learning from the midst of his labour?—had all those long years glided away, and they were face to face again, as in old times?

"I don't know whether I ought to have shaken hands with you or not," said Tarby, when they had relinquished their grasp.

"It's the hand of a friend."

"Thankee."

"It grasps the hand of one who would give much to forget the past—live it over again?"

"Ay—I told you so in the letter they taught me to write—I meant it then—I mean it now, Owen."

"And yet you are a promise-breaker."

"True."

And Tarby hung his head like a child under reproof.

"You have been to Oaklands?"

"I could not help it," said Tarby; "wasn't it natural of me—considering? Lord! what a deal of pluck it took, Owen!"

Owen had altered his route. Tarby and he were walking away from Oaklands, towards 92's cottage.

"Have you told her all, Tarby?"

"I tell her!" exclaimed Tarby; "I'd ha' sooner dropped down dead a-coming home, than stabbed her with such an awful story. Didn't I make up my mind years ago, and hasn't it growed stronger, Owen?"

"It ran a risk to-day."

"Not a bit," said Tarby, sturdily; "I took a message to her that you were coming back—you wrote me word you'd started; and I did have a desperate wish to see her once—just to know, old fellow, if she was like—her mother."

"How is she looking?" asked Owen.

"Like a real lady born—as bright and pretty a face as ever I seed, with a flash of the poor mother in it, too. P'raps if it hadn't been for me, *she* might have lived to see this day."

"Would Mary have been where she is?"

"Ah! no—I forgot that, Owen," and he held out his hand once more; "do you know what that's for?"

"No."

They shook hands again; and Tarby said,

"For keeping *her* in remembrance, and her grave like a flower-bed. Do you know, I cried like a babby at what you wrote upon the tombstone. You call her there 'your faithful mother,' and it's good of you."

"Could there have been a more faithful mother to me?"

"She was the best of women, and I—the worst of men."

"Not quite so bad as that, Tarby."

"I broke her heart by my goings on—could I have done much *wus* than that?"

Tarby's education, thanks to government schoolmasters, had improved somewhat; he could write a larger letter and spell a little, but in excited moments, as we see, he forgot his education. "I used to make fun at your larning," he said to Owen on a later day; "and hang it, if I wasn't served out myself, and taught to read and write! The hardest work in all my life, Owen."

But we are advancing too fast, and Owen and Tarby are still in the country lanes.

"So I only wanted to see her once," said Tarby, recurring to the old subject, "to know what she was like—what I could remember her by; I served my time out in the colony, I got my ticket after eight years' service—I worked the tother six on my own account, and earned six hundred pounds. I come home here to pay all I owe you, and alter my mind about dy-

ing in foreign parts. I thought I would rather share her grave when my time comes—do you blame me?"

"No."

"I sha'n't hang about Oaklands after my daughter, until the story comes out to disgrace her," continued Tarby; "you needn't be afraid of me. I swore to keep me strong when I touched English ground—I'll never break my word!"

"Is it for the best, I wonder? Why should you, who come back a better man, be deprived of one who would be for ever a blessing to you?"

"My story would come out, and it's a shame to her. She's a lady now, and it would stand in her way. She don't know me, and I should frighten her to death. Let her think her parents died honest when she was a young one. She knows the grave in Waterloo churchyard, Owen?"

"Yes."

"What does she say to no father's name being under the—mother's?"

"You died abroad."

"Ah! that's well—but when I'm stowed there myself?"

"When that time comes—a long day hence, I hope—she shall learn the story from me, if I live," said Owen. "It will be a story of a brave man's sacrifice."

"It's a duty, Owen, you know?"

"I don't know—I must think about it."

"Right or wrong, I shall keep to my part in it," said Tarby sternly; "there's no changing me—for all the love that she had for me when she was a little babby, I wouldn't have her know her father killed a man and was transported for it."

They had reached the road-side inn where Tarby had made his enquiries an hour or two before.

"Shall we enter?" asked Owen.

"Not a drop of the drink again!" cried Tarby; "I swore to that, too, long ago. I aint signed a pledge—I don't call myself a teetotaler—but I can't touch drink now. I should see the dead man's face in the glass!" added Tarby, with a shudder.

"Why, this is a great change, Tarby."

"Oughtn't there be one?"

"There was room for a little, perhaps."

Tarby looked into Owen's face, and then laughed.

"Ah, you were always a saucy young beggar—many's the time you have riled me, you—I beg pardon, you're a gentleman now."

"Who says so?"

"There's a cut about you that speaks for itself," answered



Tarby ; "and you hold your head up, like a man who's got a place in the world."

"And a place in his heart for the man who gave him the first start."

"Always?"

"Always."

"Let's shake hands again, then. You're the best of fellows."

Having passed the inn, Tarby said,

"We may as well go and see 92 again. I've a liking for that old gentleman ; I used to knock him about so. The up and down fights he and I have had in the Marsh, and the heavy weight he was when he came uppermost, Owen !"

Owen laughed.

"Ah, boy, no laughing matter," said Tarby, grimly—"there's an end to it all that takes the fun out of me !"

"The past is gone and atoned for."

"I hope so. I say, Owen, what do you think of me turning out a religious character—that's a new start, eh?"

"Rather a change."

"There was a parson out there who spent his life in trying to work a little change amongst the prisoners—hard work of his'n that the men, most of 'em, laughed at, or played the humbug with, and tried to do him. He knew my case, and picked me out amongst the rest, just as if it was ordered so. I think it was now !"

"Well?"

"Well, he made a better man of me, I think," was the modest answer ; "he made me sorry for the past, and hopeful for the future. He read the Bible to me, till I knew how to read it myself."

"Has it done you any good?"

"Why shouldn't it?" rejoined Tarby.

"Ah, why shouldn't it."

Owen did not care to prosecute the subject. The Bible had not done him any good—he had never cared to open it. He could not have the childlike faith and confidence of this man—he would have been glad to doubt it, for it was a reproach to him. For some years he had been advising Tarby, giving him honest counsel, praying him to keep steady, and live down the past ; and now Tarby was ahead of him, and might have taught him in his turn.

Six years had not humbled the spirit of Owen, and the pursuit of wealth had but hardened him. In success or reverse he had been equally the same—it had been his pride to be stoical, and he had steeled his heart against its better promptings. Once or twice in the early days he had wavered,

but further away from all whom he loved, sinking deeper and deeper into the inner mystery of self, the process of ossifying had become an easy one. And yet, strange to say, he came not wholly back a stern man ; to the friends he had left he had still the same warm heart ; those he had loved in the past, or who in the past had done him service, he turned to again—it was only to the outer world that he presented an inflexible front.

“So you’ve come back rolling in riches I suppose,” said 92, after the first greetings were over, and 92 had, with no small surprise, observed Owen’s companion ; “people do come back from Australy, nabobs and bobs of all sorts.”

“I’ve earned what I anticipated—a fair amount, but no fortune,” said Owen ; “enough to set up in business on my own account, Mr. Dell.”

“Oh, it’s very comfortable this business. And country life, after all, *is* vegetation.”

“I wonder you’ve lived in it so long, Sir,” Tarby broke in with.

“You may well wonder, Sir—it’s a ’plexity to me,” said 92, “I was delooded into these mildooded parts by fancying I should be happy near my daughter, who married and went off after a while—the way of the sex, Sir. Now I want activity. I’ve a little income—regular but small—and wouldn’t mind a business myself, or joining in with a suitable partner.”

“What do you call a suitable partner?” asked Tarby, eagerly.

“Quiet and steady, and not unused to business.”

“I wish you’d take me.”

“Eh?”

“I think you and I might jog on together very nicely somehow,” said Tarby, “although I’ve no character, and you’ve only my word—perhaps Owen’s here—that I’ve turned for the better. I’m Tarby.”

“Tarby of Lower Marsh?—wonderful !”

“A temperance advocate,” added Owen.

“A teetotamer, too—wonderfuller !”

92 took time to recover his surprise, lighted his pipe over it, and considered it in all its bearings ; and Tarby, who had found it more difficult to eschew tobacco smoke than strong beverages, lighted a pipe also and kept 92 company.

Tarby, side by side with 92 on an old garden bench, related his history and adventures since his departure “for his country’s good ;” the resolutions he had formed, and the little bit of money he had scraped together.

“We’re both lonely fellows, and getting old,” said Tarby ;

"we might be company for each other in a business—if you've less money, why eddication will make it up somewhat—you shall do all the accounts, 92."

"What business do you think on, now?"

"Oh! I haven't thought—anything quiet."

"Tarby," holding his hand out, "I'm your man."

"Thankee, 92," answered Tarby; "by George, it's like making it up with all the police force!"

So these two men, who, in the days of greater health and strength, had been constantly opposed, sank the by-gones for ever and became the best of friends. Their partnership had been strangely brought about—there was much diversity of character between them—and yet from that time forth they took to each other, and in the days of their future business together never exchanged an angry word. Tarby became somehow the junior partner, and 92 took the lead and was a trifle dictatorial—notwithstanding Tarby found three-fourths of the capital and all the energy. There were not many ideas in common between them, but Tarby gave way, being proud of his partner.

Like opposes like, and in unlikes there is an attraction. As in science, so often amidst that greater science in which few are deeply read—the inscrutable, ever-varying philosophy of human life.





## CHAPTER VII.

### GUARDIAN AND WARD.

**L**EAVING the Montague and Capulet of Lower Marsh days to sink their little differences, Owen passed through the little wicket to the country road again. He had not yet visited Oaklands, and he did not care to disturb Tarby's serenity by expressing his intention of doing so before the night ended. But his heart yearned to his ward, and he was anxious to see if time had made much difference in her. Six years, and a change from cottage life to an atmosphere more grand, must work the usual change—he had not detected it in her letters, he would be quick enough to see it face to face.

Owen was still inclined to take a morbid view of things—he would believe for the worst till the best brightened the prospect. He had left England with these views, and they had not grown less during his absence. He had fancied, or tried to fancy, that John Dell, Ruth, and Mary would all be different in the long days to come, and had prepared himself to meet the change, coldly and phlegmatically. There is a system that works well on railways, we hear—that of believing in danger till the all-right signal be displayed; such a system in life is obnoxious—it renders men distrustful, and saps at the root of all confidence! Such a system Owen appeared to cultivate—almost unconsciously—and it did not tend to improve the prospect before him.

The stars were out as he retraced his steps rapidly to the point from which Tarby and he had started together—the nights had not lengthened to any extent yet, and the daylight was gone before Ansted clock struck eight. It was not yet eight when Owen was on his way to the lodge—when he paused some little distance from the inn which Tarby had ab-

jured, and listened to voices nearing him along the country road.

Two voices—one of which was surely Mary's. It had rung too often in his ears for him to doubt it even then.

"I think it's a wild-goose chase, my dear ; and if you had only waited for the carriage we should have reached there in half the time."

"And whirled by him on the road, and so have lost him."

"Well, you will have your way—you always did, Mary, dear—and if you should be right in your surmises, and he really sent the man to break the shock of his coming—won't he think we're a little bit fussy?"

"Oh ! no—that's not like my Owen."

"Come along then, my dear, we'll go as far as Mr. Dell's cottage—and if we're not robbed and murdered down these dark lanes, it's not your fault. I was never out so late in my life."

"My dear Mrs. Cherbury, if you are in the least nervous, pray let me go alone."

"You're a fly-away thing, and not to be trusted."

There rang some pleasant laughter on the silent road—how the rippling music of one at least sank to the heart of the listener ! Owen felt new life within him, and that one dark view of things was already receding—that one very dear to him as a little sister was still the loved one of old, considering him the first and the best, as in the days of her childhood, when a word of his swayed her. Well, it was very pleasant to be kept in memory so long—he could bear all, if a grand life had not altered his ward.

Two figures of women turned the bend of the road along which he had again proceeded—he would walk past them, for fear of a surprise. In the shadowy highway, there was not much chance of recognition. He crossed to the hedgerow on the opposite side, and continued his progress—the ladies glanced towards him, the younger one with nervous eagerness.

"My dear Mary," reproved Mrs. Cherbury, "if it's a strange gentleman, whatever——"

"It's my gardy—it's Owen !" cried Mary, darting away from her protectress, full of confidence ; "Owen, I am right—say I'm right !"

"My quick-eyed ward—my dear little Mary !"

Mary forgot she had turned seventeen, and leaped up to him ; Owen flung away his six years, and lifted her in his strong arms and kissed her—it was a meeting that made amends for much bitterness of parting.

"My dear Mary !" cried Mrs. Cherbury, "aren't you a trifle

too impulsive? Good gracious me, if it had been a railway guard going home, or something of that sort!"

Mary looked confused, but she clung to the arm of her guardian.

"Do you scold me, Owen?"

"Not I."

"I am so glad to see you, that I can't think I'm any bigger than when you bade me good-bye, and nearly broke my heart. You are in England for good now?"

"Yes."

"What happy times are coming for me, gardy!"

"You must not expect too much happiness from very stern material," said Owen in reply; "we are in different worlds, you and I."

"Ah! for the present—but you will want a housekeeper, and you have come back to watch over your ward—the old promise, Owen!"

"What, are you tired of Mrs. Cherbury?" he asked in a lower tone.

"No, no, the best and the kindest of women, but I cannot change her for my guardian."

"We shall have all this talk at a time more befitting," said Owen; "meanwhile, we are treating Mrs. Cherbury very badly."

"Not at all, not at all, Mr. Owen," cried that lady, who had heard the last words of our hero; "I'm sure you have a right to forget me under the circumstances. And, my dear Mary, you are quite sure there's no mistake? I've known some dreadful cases of mistaken identity."

"Let me risk the introduction, Mrs. Cherbury," said Mary laughing.

The introduction was made, and Mrs. Cherbury very frankly extended her hand to Owen.

"I am glad you have returned, Sir," she said; and then added, after a pause, "for Mary's sake."

Mrs. Cherbury was doubtful how it might turn out for her own—how much love she might lose!—whether with the love might not vanish away the girl who had wound her way round her heart.

"At least I shall have four years of happiness," she had said, on the day Mary's choice was made; but happy years flash along like the lightning, and lo! it is the Present again, which the bright lightning has scathed! Here was another to step between Mary and her—another whom Mary had ever confessed to love best—and yet she was an unselfish woman, and for Mary's sake was glad.

"Your son, Mrs. Cherbury, is still absent from England, I suppose?" asked Owen as they neared Oaklands.

"Oh! yes"—with a sigh; "always absent, Sir."

Had it been otherwise, the probability was that Owen would have gone no further than the lodge; for he was a man who treasured up too much of the past, or rather too many of the bitter memories appertaining to it.

At the lodge there was a long talk with Mrs. Cutchfield, who insisted upon asserting that Owen had grown; and it was not till nearly nine o'clock that Owen, his ward, and Mrs. Cherbury were in the spacious drawing-room at Oaklands. In the full light Owen felt he was the central figure, the object of interest to Mrs. Cherbury and her *protégée*—in the full light his eyes could wander to his ward also, and note the changes that six years had made in her.

A lovely girl, budding into womanhood, and still retaining all the child's frankness and affection—the old love existent in as fair a form and face as had ever crossed him in his wanderings. In the midst of the beauty that he gazed upon, and was as proud of as though it had been his sister's, he fancied there was more of the mother's likeness predominant than he had been a witness heretofore. He felt the resemblance existed, and that it drew him towards her—if he treasured bitter memories, in the midst of all he had suffered and had yet to suffer, the remembrance of the true mother never escaped him. Had the world really changed Mary, checked her affection, lured it naturally to a strange source, he would have loved her for that likeness through it all; she would have ever been his sister to be watched over, and kept from harm.

And Mary in her turn, taking stock of the guardian, thought what an earnest face, if a little stern, his had become! A face which, amidst the lines that were there before their time, was a truthful, expressive face, which looked at the world steadily, and flinched not from the storm that its frown might forebode.

Mary was new to that world, and knew not its uncharitableness, guessed not what had already risen in Owen's thoughts as he sat watching her bright face.

He had promised her once that his home should be hers till she married and went away for good; he believed then that a word would bring her to his side from her grand home, but he had already seen the futility of such a scheme. As guardian and ward, brother and sister, the world would have no mercy on them—they were too young to escape censure, and must wait awhile. Nine-and-twenty could not set itself up as the sole protector of a girl not eighteen years of age.

When he was gray-haired—and there were gray hairs in his locks already—he should assert his claim, and become her guardian in earnest. A foolish idea, he thought a moment afterwards: Mary would marry a gentleman, one of the Cherbury set, and pass for ever from his protection. Tarby had thought so, and, with an eye to future relationship, had vowed ever to remain dead to the daughter. Yes, she would marry, and the promise made to her mother would pass away as surely, as one less to love would pass away from him also.

Owen stayed late that night at Oaklands—he had much to relate concerning Australia, and Mary was never tired of listening. Mrs. Cherbury was solicitous that Owen should make Oaklands his home for a few days—"save such a deal of fuss in coming backwards and forwards, my dear Sir," but Owen was firm, and the Cherbury hospitality was a little distasteful to him. The kind motherly old lady exerted herself to make him welcome, but the name stood in the way of gaining much progress—she was the mother of one who had scouted him as a thief.

Still, Mrs. Cherbury's manners won upon him—there was an amiable disposition evident, and she was attached to his ward. He had been agreeably disappointed in her also, having anticipated a highly-starched fine lady, from whom her son had possibly inherited his stiffness and angularity. He was speedily undeceived, and might have softened even more during that first interview, if Mary had not monopolised so much of his attention.

Owen could only reconcile Mary to parting with him by promising another visit on the morrow; and Mary, no slave to etiquette, and whose childlike affection went beyond all precedents, was with difficulty persuaded from seeing him as far as the lodge down the dark carriage drive.

"Is he not my guardian?" was her assertion; and it required Owen's negative also to keep her in the drawing-room.

"What a pity it is that I am growing too big, as you call it," said Mary to Mrs. Cherbury, when Owen had departed—"as if the more I should grow, the less I should love him who has come back to make my life happy. Am I to out-grow the child's heart, Mrs. Cherbury?"

"Not for all the world, my dear," said Mrs. Cherbury; "but he is so much younger than I expected to find him, and you are only seventeen, and must sink the child in the woman. What will *he* think?"

"Oh, if it only depends on what my Owen thinks——"



"But, my dear, he isn't *your* Owen," corrected Mrs. Cherbury; "you said so twice this evening, and I am sure the young man quite blushed again. And what Mr. Owen and I may take as the impulsive affection of your warm young heart, other people may put a very different construction upon."

"But I don't care for other people!"

"My dear Mary, be assured you will have to study them a little," said Mrs. Cherbury; "the older you grow the less consideration they will have for you. I—I hope, my dear, I am not paining you, but I am an old woman who has seen much of the world, and I fancy it is useful counsel I am giving you."

The woman whom the world had not hardened, let her hand rest on that of the impetuous girl's. In the school of life it was Mary's first harsh lesson, and she could see how necessary it was to learn it, despite a strange wish to rebel, and trust to her own judgment. She had been the child Owen had left six years ago that night—it would be necessary, maidenly, to evince more respect and less affection.

"He will never take me to his home, now," she said, mournfully; "more than once to-night he has implied that."

Mrs. Cherbury was very glad to find that Owen had such forethought, although she attempted consolation.

"Well, it would hardly be right, my love," said she; "but you must not consider that a sorrow. I—I hope you won't, for my sake?"

"No, I won't sorrow about it," said the girl, hastily dashing a tear or two from her eyes; "I feel it's right, and that six years' brooding upon it cannot alter the position. But he *did* promise me!"

"He was younger himself by six years, and you were only a child of eleven," said Mrs. Cherbury; "people can't lay out their love like a plot of garden-ground. Besides, you are not going to be miserable with me—because the guardian comes home. All the love that has grown up between us will not die away like that, my darling."

"Never, my dear, never!"

And Mary flung herself into Mrs. Cherbury's arms, and cried for some reason better known to herself than to the world. And maidens are incomprehensible, and will shed tears over out-of-the-way subjects, and would be puzzled themselves to tell what the tears are for. True maidenhood is shy and impulsive, and full of the generous unworldly thoughts belonging to days past for ever; hovering between girlhood and womanhood, it flutters vainly against the bars

which are as a screen from the outer perils, concerning which it is ignorant. They are barriers in the way of a free flight and an open heart ; the struggle is painful if short, and reason sits down with a sigh to life's "proprieties."

In one or two of the sighs that escaped Mary then, and troubled the faithful bosom on which her head rested, there escaped also much of the free nature of the child--much of its wildness and excitability--and there remained behind ever the loving woman, impulsive still as was her nature, but capable to take her part in the crowd, and better able to think for herself and for others.

One may dream on for six years, and heed not how time flies—one may wake in an instant to a new life and its duties.





## CHAPTER VIII.

### MARKS PROGRESS.

**Q**WEN saw the change in Mary Chickney, and was doubtful if he were pleased with it or not. So many people whom he met were prone to disguise, and regulated their actions so constantly by set rules, that the warm heart speaking in every word and action of his ward had exercised a strange charm on the night of their meeting.

There was something constrained and diffident about her from that day ; he had parted with the child, and yet from that day a graceful young woman came ever forth to meet him. To meet him gladly, and to make little effort to disguise her joy at seeing him ; to listen to his words and set store by them ; always quick to understand his lightest wish and obey it, but nevertheless not the Mary of old.

A sister and ward, with less exhibition of love for him, and more of a respect far too deep and reverential to please. He felt it was right, that the change was better for both Mary and him ; but it was not the more pleasant. He knew the child's heart had closed—perhaps no longer existed—and that every little joy and trouble would not be offered to him to share again. She would esteem it frivolous talk, and the world would cast its shadow, by an inevitable rule, ever between them. He should not lose her affection he felt assured—but he would miss her confidence, and the woman of the name of Cherbury would be trusted more than himself.

Very right and proper, but very hard to bear—a necessity that there was no fighting against ; therefore let him be content, or appear so.

During their second meeting he spoke of his home.

“I have seen John Dell, and am going to live with him

again, Mary," he said ; "he and I settle down to our old positions, just as if six years had made no difference between us. He has offered me partnership, and I am better able to accept a share in his work, and to work for him. This is not the picture, Mary, you drew for me when I went away from England."

"No, Owen," said Mary gravely ; "it was a child's fancy sketch, and not likely to be realised."

"Still you thought the guardian would come back for his ward," said Owen ; "and till you married, I had fancied your home might be mine. But it is better as it is, Mary. I hope you think that?"

"Yes."

"You will be glad to see me often at Oaklands, and you would perhaps have tired of me and my little smoke-dried house in London after a time."

"Never, Owen—you don't believe that," she cried, and then checked herself with some embarrassment.

"Well, we will say no more on the subject," said he ; "I am the guardian to come once or twice a-week and pay my stately visits to Oaklands, keeping a watch on everybody inclined to fall in love with you, and dispute my rightful authority. I suppose there will come a time when the ward, growing rebellious, will resist my commands?"

"No, Owen," was the answer, "your word will ever be law to me. You will find me to the last an obedient ward."

"Wait awhile : ' promises spoken—especially rash ones—are made to be broken !'"

Mary shook her head.

"We can look back at some dead promises strewing the way already, Mary," said he ; "don't let us make any fresh ones. Already you have a right to take wing and away from me, and my guardianship is only a name."

"Oh, don't say that !" cried Mary ; "I shall never be happy if I think you have given up control of me ; that you leave me in the world unstrengthened by your counsel, perhaps forgotten by yourself."

"Have I so many friends that I can afford to forget the best of them?"

"Really the best?" asked Mary with sparkling eyes.

"Never a better one in all the world."

"Then I'm not sorry I've become a young woman."

It was the old frank speaking, at which Owen laughed, and Mary coloured a moment afterwards. Why, this was better than working in Australia ; a place where he had made but

few acquaintances and found no friends. This was real life opening to him, and he might be happy therein.

Owen soon began life in earnest under John Dell. Energetic and clear-headed, he applied his abilities to the task before him, and both partners worked on with a will. Dell felt a weight removed from his shoulders; it was a great satisfaction to find Owen sharing the business with him, and that six years' knocking about in a strange land had not been the worst of chances for his friend. Owen was stern in his way, looked perhaps a little too gravely at the surface of things—even studied the money question a trifle too closely—but he was no longer morbid, and never talked of despair, and solitary futures. Dell knew that Owen had returned no more religious than he had set forth—that the consciousness of his own power was enough for him, and that sufficient for the day was the good thereof as well as the evil. Still Dell hoped that a time would come when this strange young man would think a little more deeply concerning matters of moment—after all, Owen was not hard to move, and the time *would* come to work a change. Till then he would not preach—no man should ever accuse John Dell of cant and hypocrisy!

Dell had not wholly fathomed our hero's character, it was difficult to thoroughly comprehend; possibly it was an unsettled character, for in the midst of much that seemed quiet and methodical and painstaking, there flashed out at times something of the past restlessness.

Dell thought he could bear to speak of the mother now, and mentioned her name, expressing a hope even that she had not gone wholly back to the past life; and Owen turned almost fiercely towards him.

"My mother is for ever dead to me—don't thrust the disgrace before me anew. I have done with it."

"Don't say you are still unforgiving, Owen," answered Dell, reproachfully.

"I bear no malice—if I were mistaken, the fault is my own," said he. "I am only anxious to consider her dead."

"Suppose she starts forth from the living again—what then?"

"She turned from me—I have done with her!"

"Ah! you may think so!—I doubt it."

And perhaps Owen doubted also, for he made no attempt to defend his assertions. It was a subject he was anxious to consider ended for ever—let him forget it, and live alone in the present. In the present there was much to do, many plans to carry out—one of which in particular the reader will be troubled with in our next book. In the present he desired

to show a calm front in the battle of life ; he had outlived romance, and in the sober reality around him he desired to work and save money. He was saving money for two ends, neither selfish—one was for his ward's dowry, when "one of the Cherbury set" carried her off. His ward should not pass portionless away from his charge, whenever her turn came to love and be loved.

Every day he thought more of that time advancing—she was a beautiful, amiable girl, and must soon touch the heart of the stranger. What *he* would be like to be worthy of her, he did not know—he could not imagine. But he would be watchful, for Mary's sake, and no false colours should deceive him. The trying time was coming for his innocent ward ; sooner or later it must be. He had spent six years abroad, —during the only period he could leave her, and be true to the promise he had made Mary's mother—now it was his duty to be watchful, lest the outposts should be passed and he never the wiser.

Alone with Mrs. Cherbury one day, he very openly asked the question, as a guardian's right, concerning the state of Mary's heart.

"I presume it to be untouched yet," he said lightly, "but seventeen or eighteen is an age when love may affect the heart and head of a girl—you as her friend must have had opportunities of observation."

"Good gracious, our Mary !" said Mrs. Cherbury ; "why, she was only a child six months—three months ago. She has never thought of a sweetheart in her life, I'm sure. Time enough, Mr. Owen, for a fussy state of existence. You don't wish her to marry early, I hope !"

"Why should I ?"

"Because you're so very quick with your suspicions that her affections may be engaged," replied Mrs. Cherbury ; "and it's seldom your sex take so much interest. It's the mother and female friends—never the father, and brothers, and guardians."

"I am an exception to the rule, then—Mary's 'love-affairs' will be a subject of paramount interest to me," said Owen.

"I don't say you're in the wrong, Sir," said Mrs. Cherbury, "but it's a little remarkable, or else I haven't been used to seeing the masculine gender quite so fidgety. My poor husband never took notice of anything, even when it was quite plain and unmistakable, and my lad was the only one who did not see that Mr. Glindon was falling in love with Miss Dell."

Owen thought that was plain enough to be seen, at least,

but he was not talking of Mr. Glindon and his wife. They did not belong to the present—they were living in the country, and had vanished away from his sphere. Owen wished to speak only of his ward, for he was anxious concerning her.

Mrs. Cherbury should have set his doubts at rest, but still his anxiety did not seem to abate—he knew in his heart that it was increasing. Calm and matter-of-fact as he might appear, there was little doubt of Mary perplexing him—every day he became more watchful and solicitous. Things that did not appear to be connected with her future happiness even began to disturb him.

A letter from Isaac Cherbury that arrived when he was at Oaklands set him thinking very much.

It was a brief letter, as Mrs. Cherbury might have anticipated, but it contained important tidings, and carried the good lady to the seventh heaven of excitement.

Isaac Cherbury's head was no better, possibly worse—a physician had recommended his native air—he thought he should return home, and he was her affectionate son, Isaac Cherbury.

"He'll be glad to have his old mother nursing him!" cried Mrs. Cherbury; "oh! dear, I shall be the happiest woman in the world then—Isaac and Mary."

Owen objected to this coupling of their names—he did not know why—it was sheer accident, but it made him secretly angry. Mr. Cherbury might never return, and if he did it was not any business of Owen's, and could influence Mary's life but little—Owen's not at all. He and his ward would meet as often, if in a different place—for it was doubtful if he should face Mr. Cherbury, a man who had humbled him, and who knew the secret of his early life.

When a second letter arrived, informing Mrs. Cherbury that her son had really resolved to return, Owen took a bold step. His was a straightforward nature, at least, and his quick eye saw the embarrassments that might eventually arise. He would be first with that avowal of his antecedents, which possibly Mr. Isaac Cherbury might think it his business to communicate. Older as he had grown, with more faith in the world's judgment of a man who had worked upwards like himself, he felt his voice falter and his cheeks redden with the avowal. But it was necessary, and he made it.

"Your son returns in the course of a few weeks?"

"Thank God!—yes," answered the mother.

"It will possibly make some little difference in my visits to my ward," said he; "I shall see her at the lodge—take her for a stroll in the green lanes once or twice a-week,

but probably my visits here will cease with your son's return."

"My son is the quietest of men," said Mrs. Cherbury; "I am sure——"

"I am sure that he will not care to have me as a guest at his mother's house—that I shall not care to face him."

"Owen," exclaimed Mary, turning pale, "what do you mean?"

Mrs. Cherbury sat open-mouthed and very much amazed, waiting for Owen's explanation.

"Years ago I was in your husband's service, Mrs. Cherbury, then in your son's. Years before that, a poor boy, with no moral counsellors, and not a single teacher to tell me right from wrong, I stole for bread, and the law called me thief, and locked me up. Rescued from evil by Mary's mother, supported by John Dell in my efforts to escape the dark life in which I might have sunk for ever, I worked upwards, and entered, as I have said, your husband's service. The past life was a disgrace to me, and I kept it a secret, believing it known but to one man upon earth—it was a slur on my good name, and of my good name I was proud. Your son gave me my first check, and cast me back, as I thought, to the old disgrace; he discovered my secret, and became ungenerous and suspicious. Judge if I can meet that man again?"

"It is very strange," said Mrs. Cherbury; "but you must have mistaken my son, if you thought he would despise any such efforts as yours. He is a silent and reserved man—perhaps a suspicious one—but he never despised a worthy motive, or an honest effort, I am sure."

"There was not much explanation of his motives or of mine—I relinquished his service, and he filled my place with a man whose character would bear an acuter test. I am not blaming him,—I am inclined to think that he was right, knowing how few true reformations there are—but I cannot face him in this house."

"Well, there will be time enough to talk of this when Isaac returns," said Mrs. Cherbury, anxious to dismiss a painful subject, and perhaps seeing a way to reconcile matters that appeared insurmountable to Owen; "you will not turn from us, or desert Mary here, because my son has wounded your feelings, I am sure."

"Are you not both alarmed at me?" said Owen, feeling wondrously relieved now the revelation was made.

"I am proud of a friend who has fought upwards so bravely" said Mrs. Cherbury.



"Thank you, Madam," said Owen, turning somewhat nervously for his answer to Mary, who sat still pale and silent.

"You have understood what is right from a child, too, Mary—can you understand me?"

"My dear guardian," burst forth Mary, in an excited manner, "am I old enough to understand all your perseverance, to guess why you have always been kind, and gentle, and faithful to me, for the sake of the mother who left me so young to your guidance? Will you think that I love you the better for it?"

"I will think you the best little woman in the world, having faith and charity to all men!" he cried.

He thought of Mary's father at that moment, and whether he and Tarby had been right in their narrow judgment to keep the secret of her parentage a mystery. Here was a love that would forgive everything, and Tarby was entitled to it—a love to endure and grow strong. And yet it was Tarby's wish that that pure-minded, sensitive girl should not be stung with the knowledge of crime, taking a share of her father's punishment, and exposing herself to a verdict from society that would be one-sided and unfair. Society has no time to look to the fitness of things; to test the strength of the under current, and the value of the straws that float to the surface—it judges, and condemns, and passes on. Society would say she was the daughter of a man who had been transported for manslaughter—perhaps Tarby was right, and it was better that the curtain should hang ever between the father and daughter. It was the father's wish at least, and he had no right to interfere. Owen went more often to see his ward after that day; when Mr. Cherbury returned, he was certain there would be an inconvenience attached to his visits to Oaklands. Mr. Cherbury might be sorry for his own part in the past—it was just possible—but he had no liking for the man—he never should have. He would go more often to Oaklands now, and less when the family circle had increased—thus striking a balance between his love and his pride. It was Owen's argument or excuse for his frequent visits—he did not appear to want an excuse, and yet he often made one to his wondering ward.

The summer had come when Mr. Isaac Cherbury returned. Owen had received no information of his arrival, and was shown into the drawing-room where Mrs. Cherbury and her son awaited him. He paused on the threshold irresolutely—the remembrance of his last meeting with the man stole across him, and aroused his pride.

"Mr. Owen," said Mrs. Cherbury, "my son has been anxiously waiting to see you."

"Indeed!"

Mr. Cherbury rose and advanced to Owen with an extended hand.

"Mr. Owen, I am glad to see you. I hope the past is forgotten?"

He said it in his usual heavy manner, as though he had been rehearsing his speech beforehand, but the grasp of his hand was a friendly one, and the face seemed to mean what its owner asserted.

"Quite forgotten," answered Owen immediately.

"I was hasty and unwell—I had missed——"

"Quite forgotten, Sir," repeated Owen, with some sharpness.

"Ah, you are right," he said; "it is best to drop the subject. I am a man of few words, and my head aches more than it used. A constant and insufferable headache, Mr. Owen."

"A bad complaint," was the dry rejoinder.

"I have tried travel, and the excitement belonging thereto—I come back to the Surrey hills."

"You will find no better air."

"No, I think not. Mrs. Cherbury, do you mind talking to Mr. Owen now?—my temples are going it like mad!"

And, with half-shut eyes, this hypochondriacal gentleman betook himself to his arm-chair, and relapsed into his usual "statuesqueness," looking perhaps a trifle more stony than his wont. Owen fancied six years had not altered him or his ways much, and he wondered within himself why Mrs. Cherbury should testify so much delight at his return. What was there to love, admire, esteem in the man, full of his own complaints, and ever shut up in himself.

Later in the evening, when Owen thought he had been asleep an hour or two, Mr. Cherbury suddenly said,

"How's John Dell getting on?"

"Very well, Sir—I am his partner in business," Owen added, with pardonable pride.

"Ah, you will both succeed. The old business, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Is John Dell well?"

"Quite well, I thank you."

"A desperate man when he gets in a passion," said Isaac, with a shudder. "Mrs. Cherbury, isn't it time to take that medicine?"

"Another half-hour, my dear."

"Very well—don't forget."

And Mr. Cherbury subsided again, to arouse himself for a moment before Owen's departure.

"You will come here just the same to see your ward?" he asked a little anxiously.

Owen hesitated.

"I ask it as a favour."

Owen bowed, and then, perplexed with Mr. Cherbury's eccentricities, left the drawing-room.

Mary went with him to the hall, and said,

"You will come, Owen?"

"I will come to Ansted."

"Not to Oaklands?" said Mary—"oh, Owen, you don't bear malice in your heart against your old master?"

"No—but it is unpleasant to face him."

"But it will make Mrs. Cherbury unhappy, I am sure."

"And she has been a good friend to my ward. Well, I'll come."

The following week Owen, to his surprise, found Mr. Cherbury looking ten years younger. Half the lines in the face appeared to have been ironed out, and there was quite a smile in their place as Owen entered the room. Mary had been playing the piano, but she quickly left the music-stool to give him welcome. Mr. Cherbury had risen, too, and was the first to shake hands with him.

"Your ward has been trying an experiment on my nervous headache, Mr. Owen," he said, "and I think she has succeeded. Mozart before medicine, after all!"

"I told him seven years ago he gave way too much, and only wanted rousing," said Mrs. Cherbury.

"If Mr. Owen will excuse me, I should like to hear the fourth part of the symphony," said Mr. Cherbury.

"Don't try your head too much, dear," said his mother.

"I don't mean," was the dry rejoinder.

Owen was led to study Mr. Cherbury more intently that evening. There was certainly a great improvement in his manner as well as his looks—he had emerged from himself, and was certainly more pleasant company. He would have detained Mary at the piano all the evening if Mrs. Cherbury had not interposed; and when the piano was closed he joined more freely in the general topics of conversation than his mother had known him for years.

"I think I must have ipped him to death, Mr. Owen," said his mother to our hero; "I humoured the crotchets on his head and his nerves, and it was only rousing he wanted. Six years' travelling about the world worked no change—one week with my light-hearted *protégé*, and he's almost the son

of the very old times. What a charm there is in youth to take the fussiness out of us !”

“Yes,” said Owen, drily.

Mrs. Cherbury rambled on, and Owen, fixed on the sofa beside her, listened very attentively, and watched Mr. Cherbury’s eyes, and thought they turned a little too often in the direction of his ward. Mr. Cherbury might require rousing, but he objected to his ward making the experiment ; an unaccountable objection, but none the less strong. Better, in his opinion, for the man to have kept his headache all his life than be indebted to Mary Chickney for its lighter sensations. He did not begrudge his ward her light heart and her flow of spirits ; he only envied their effect on Mr. Cherbury. And there was something in Mrs. Cherbury he objected to, also ; she was too full of her son, too solicitous to intrude him upon Owen’s attention : trumpeting his virtues, and looking askance out of her eyes to note their effect upon Owen.

“How do you like Mr. Cherbury, Mary ?” Owen said in a low tone, when he had contrived to escape from the mother to the side of his ward.

“Oh, better every day.”

Owen did not relish the answer, but he made no reply.

“He was very dull and grave at first—like a ghost, Owen,” said Mary, “but the last few days have made a great alteration in him. He has taken off the mask of stolidity, and changed into a well-bred conversational gentleman. A little too matter-of-fact, perhaps, like my grave gardy, when a business fit’s on him.”

“When is that ?”

“Oh ! not very often at Oaklands,” replied Mary ; “but I fancied he was dreaming of the accounts when Mrs. Cherbury was talking to him—am I right ?”

“No, Mary—I was thinking of you.”

“Of me ?”

“That is of your future—of one or two things presently to be discussed between you and me. How old is this restored-from-the-dead gentleman ?”

“Mr. Cherbury, do you mean ?”

“Yes.”

“His mother was talking of his age to-day—only fifty, Owen.”

“Ah ! quite a youth !” said Owen, satirically.

But Mary did not understand satire, and looked at Owen for an explanation.

“Don’t you like Mr. Cherbury ?” she enquired.

"Not much—if the truth must be told," said he; "why should any affection for him be anticipated from me?"

"I don't know that it is anticipated," said Mary; "but he is the son of a kind friend of your ward's."

"I shall become used to him in time," answered Owen.

"You would like him if you saw him more frequently," said Mary; "he really has changed for the better. Mrs. Cherbury says I am the good genius of the family, and bring a blessing to each of its members; and if I can make him more of the son and less of the stoic, I shall have done some little good in my time."

Owen did not seem elated at the prospect; on the contrary, went away with so stern an expression of countenance, that Mary teased herself with the fear that in some manner or other she had unwittingly offended him. And that stern expression which had alarmed Mary, Owen took back to London, and kept for three or four days, as much to the perplexity of his partner as it had been to Mary Chickney. Owen was a faithful guardian, and the importance of his charge began to weigh upon him. She was young and impressionable, saw little society, and owed a debt of gratitude to Mrs. Cherbury—what a strange end to a story if that man before all others should be accepted of Mary for a husband! Incidents as strange happened every day—men of fifty took as incomprehensible steps; girls as young chose suitors as old, and lived happily with them—life in the world was so different to life in books. He prayed it might not be—that he might never be asked to give his consent to such an union; he grew miserable and dull about it, then excited. So fair, so young, so lovable a girl was not fit for the man who had out-lived youth, and should be beyond the pale of youth's sympathy. He must stop it!

"Stop what?" said Dell.

Owen had given voice to his last thoughts, and Dell looked up from his account-books at his junior partner. Owen hesitated only for a moment. Why should he not trust this old friend?

"Stop Isaac Cherbury falling in love with my ward."

"Eh!"

John Dell pushed away his books and leaned over the desk full of interest.

"Just say that again," said he.

Owen repeated his assertion, adding thereto, "And I'll stop it. Youth and age mated together have an up-hill fight for happiness. Mary's path shall be smooth, if it lies in my power."

"Who told you this?"

"No one."

"All fancy, Owen—it's impossible."

"I tell you I am in the right."

"Shall I tell you something?"

"Go on."

"You're falling in love with your own ward. Always the case with young guardians, and serve 'em right."

"I in love—and with Mary! Dell, don't aggravate me."

"I have done."

"But haven't you anything to say with regard to Cherbury?"

"A man not to be trusted."

Dell was poring over his books again and did not notice Owen's start.

"The worst that could happen to your ward would be her marriage to Isaac Cherbury—that's all."

"But——"

"But that's all, Owen—don't you see I'm busy?" he added, a little peevishly.

Owen had only gained fresh food for thought by asking John Dell's advice; there was one thing to be learned from it—that Dell's opinion of such a match was similar to his own. Not that his partner's opinion was always worth a great deal—to wit, his ridiculous assertion, that he was falling in love with his own ward. He fall in love with a girl of seventeen!—why, was he not going on for thirty years of age? She was only a child still, and he was a man of the world who had seen sorrow. What was there in her to please him, or in him to draw her towards his sternness and coldness? They might make a happy couple, but Mary was not for him. She did not love him—never would love him. There was no confusion in her manner towards him—a sister could not be more frank and confiding. Still, she must not be sacrificed to Cherbury, or talked into accepting him by the mother. He could make her more happy than the retired merchant; for he understood her nature, and his heart had not quite withered within him. She would be happier with him, too—he knew that, he was sure of that—they were old friends. When a boy, he had held her in his arms a baby. Heaven! what a different life it would be for him and her; surely a brighter one, for his heart beat at the thought, and his eyes swam till the picture before him became blurred and indistinct.

He was in the railway train and making for Ansted that afternoon. He was at Oaklands long before sundown. He

must study this Mr. Cherbury, who might rob him of his ward, playing the thief in his turn. The change in his late employer was still progressing ; five more years off the man's age, and his "confounded head," in a figurative sense, entirely thrown aside. No mistake in the man's motives either ; all clear as noon-day to every one but Mary Chickney. Fifty years or more a bachelor, and now his withered, tough, old heart pierced by the arrow—evidence of *that* in his attention to Mary, in his desire to ingratiate himself with Owen, in the change in everything about him, even to his past inflexible bell-metal voice.

"Mr. Owen, you should be proud of your ward," he said that night.

"Why?" was the quiet response.

"She has the priceless gift of bringing sunshine to a house—to a man's heart," he said, enthusiastically.

Quite gone, thought Owen, and drifting into romance. What an ass, to be sure !

"Well, I am proud of her," answered Owen.

"Doubtless."

Mr. Cherbury seemed inclined to add a little more ; but his natural taciturnity got the better of him. Fortunately too ; for Owen was inclined to acerbity that evening, and might have answered more sharply than courtesy warranted. Mr. Cherbury walked slowly away across the lawn—the short dialogue had taken place on the grass-plot—and left Owen to his own thoughts concerning him.

The man was in love, no doubt of it, thought Owen ; he would be frivolous and drivelling soon, like all *old men* inspired or touched by the tender passion. He would be more ridiculous, then, and less likely to impress his ward. There was something in that new gravity of his, so different from his ancient "lumpishness," that probably interested Mary, and encouraged her in her good work of making a different man of Isaac Cherbury. Wait till he made a fool of himself by becoming sentimental !

Mary was talking to Mr. Cherbury at that instant—she was looking up at him, and saying a few laughing words—and the face of Isaac Cherbury changed and softened wondrously, whilst she addressed him.

"Curse him if he step before me, and take her away too," muttered Owen ; and the shadow of the curse was on his face when Mary came towards him.

"Why, Owen, dull again, to-night?"

"As you see."

"Will you tell me what's the matter?"

"*A business fit*," he answered, sullenly.

"Did I offend you, gardy, by talking of your business fits the other night? Oh! how altered you are, to take offence at such trifles!"

"I do not take offence readily—is it likely, Mary, that with you I should be the first to feel offended? But—but, ward, sister, Mary—I am unhappy."

Mary's hands were on his arm at once—she had not lost her interest in him, or in his words, and the look of excitement in her face made his heart thrill.

"Will you walk with me a little way, Mary?"

"Into the park?"

"Anywhere."

"And you will not keep your secrets from me, then? You will tell me what makes you unhappy?"

"Yes—every word."

They were in the park five minutes hence—all the way thither, down the green slopes, whence the deer scampered at their approach, Owen was silent. Under the first green boughs of the great elms he stopped, and held both hands towards her, and she, looking straight into his searching eyes, placed her hands within his own.

"Mary, my secret—such as it is—concerns you."

"Concerns me—it is not I who make you unhappy?"

"Ah! but it is."

"I am so sorry," and Mary's lips quivered.

"I am unhappy lest Mr. Cherbury should ask you to be his wife. There is a great change in him, and you are the cause; Mrs. Cherbury's heart is in her son and your happiness. Is there anything more natural than her desire to see you man and wife?—anything more likely than it should strike that man what a golden after-time his life would be with you? So, Mary, I am unhappy about you."

She could feel his hands tremble as they clasped her own. Her own heart was beating strangely, and for the first time in life she could not meet his gaze.

"I am sorry, Owen."

"If he asked you, would you marry him?"

"No."

"It might be the wish of her whose love you have won—a wish pressed urgently for her son's sake: it would be in the eyes of society a good match."

"Owen, would you wish it?" she asked suddenly.

"Not for all the world."

"I am your ward—ever dutiful and obedient, Owen, in remembrance of that love which has a claim before Mrs. Cher-



bury's, before the whole world, my guardian. If I loved him—which I do not, which I never can—it would depend upon your answer."

"I say for once and ever—No."

"Then you will not distrust me any more, Owen?"

"I said I was unhappy, Mary—I never spoke of distrust. I fear, too, I am growing a jealous guardian, whose dark looks will scare every lover away. Can you bear with me till you are one-and-twenty?"

"Till I am old and gray."

"Ever obedient, Mary—never repining at my will?"

"I think not."

"Then let my guardianship cease—I resign it. And let a new right to protect you be earnestly sought—let the lover take the place of the guardian, and the affianced wife that of the ward. Mary, I love you!"

"Oh! Owen."

She tried to release her hands from his then, but he held them firmer in his own. She was trembling like a leaf in his grasp, and the tears were welling from the dark, downcast eyes.

"This is a strange wooing—forgive me if I pain you. I do not ask you to love me now, Mary—the guardian changes too suddenly to expect it. Take a year to consider if my grim self be worth the living for, if my life be worth the brightening by your presence; and at any time within it, if your heart fail you, say, 'Owen, give up all thought of me, it is best,' and I will resign you, and trouble you never more by a word."

"Owen, you love me?"

"With all my heart and soul, Mary."

"I am not too young for you—you, you could bear with all my childish ways?"

"They would lighten my toil, and add to my love."

"Then—then, Owen, I will be your wife when the year closes; a year for you as well as for me, lest this be an impulse that carries you beyond your intentions. Oh! Owen, is it unmaidenly to say that—that this has been a hope, and a dream of mine so long?"

"My dear girl—my own Mary!"

"Didn't I say that you were to come back from Australia to marry me?" she said, shyly.

"A child's dream, that comes true, Mary, in the future."

"Ay, God willing."

It was said hopefully, but it sounded like a doubt in his ears till he pressed her in his strong arms to his breast, and then hope came back, and far away in the future the bright life seemed awaiting him.

He thought so, but his heart was making wild leaps, and in his reason there was no calmness that night. He was madly happy. It was the first deep draught of happiness—true and pure—he had snatched at in his life. To find that he was loved for himself, that the fair girl by his side had no fear of the future. The bright life awaited him, he thought—beyond in the sunshine it lay, with only twelve months intervening. What were twelve months to him, who would see her almost every day?—who every day would love her more deeply and truly! They were engaged, and in a year they would be married. His best life would date from the day their hands and hearts were united.

Both were young, and to the young is ever given such dazzling visions, where the heart knows no sorrow. To Owen's mind all the great trials of life had gone by—as if trials ended, like a comedy, when the lovers' hands were linked together. The sun was bright on his path, and he looked not for the shadows; standing on the rock, the murmurs of the last storm sounded faintly—the storm which might break over him, and end all. Drifting towards him were the figures that he deemed he had thrust back, or that had vanished away of their free will—slowly, surely onwards to one end; to one trial that might make him, or dash the cup from his lip.

**END OF THE FIFTH BOOK.**


## BOOK VI.

CAST ASHORE.



## CHAPTER I.

### "OWEN'S HELP."

N the heart of Lambeth, amidst that labyrinth of streets threaded once by John Dell and Owen in search of a lost woman, there opened suddenly a refuge for the poor and houseless. There was no parade in its opening ; there was not even a single voice at the doors to proclaim the glad tidings to the wanderers—it was left to work its own way in the world. Two words were written over the door, and they told their story to those who could read, who repeated it to those who could not ; and so the good news went abroad to the starvelings. "THE HELP" it was called by its founder ; "OWEN'S HELP" by those who sought shelter therein, and were grateful to the charitable hand which had pointed the way. A quiet, unobtrusive institution, that one might pass a dozen times ; merely a few of the small houses of the neighbourhood knocked into one, and communicating with what had formerly been a carriage-breaker's shed, but which was now a dormitory—large, well-ventilated, and containing a number of mattresses. It was a place where no questions were asked of the comer—his warrant was the rags that hung round him ; his claim for shelter was the pinched white face, or hers the skeleton baby in her arms. A bread supper, a rest till the morning, a poor breakfast, were offered—things not to tempt the indolent to take advantage of charity, but were none the less god-sends to the outcasts. Thither went the old and the young ; the ghosts of the better days ; the offscourings of that which had always been vile ; the thoroughly bad, who would ever oust honest poverty from its claim ; the weak, fighting still to be good, and to whom one night's shelter from the streets might be one more screen from temptation. In the midst might be

even the pride that turned from the workhouse as a disgrace—"that had lived its forty years in the parish and paid its poor-rates in its time, and had never once asked relief, Sirs," and the despair which the workhouse porter had turned away and slammed the gates against. "Owen's Help" was open to all, and cared not for parish, character, or imposture; till the place was full, the waifs of the street might flow in through its portals and be sure of a welcome. And from the surging crowd in such a parish what waifs were they, and when the dark winter months came round, how they streamed towards the beacon, and fought their way, and were baffled and heart-sick so often by the ominous "FULL" that was placed over the doors. There were no loiterers allowed at "The Help"—every morning by nine o'clock the place was expected to be empty; now and then one weary and wayworn, to whom a few hours' rest were life, was suffered to remain till midday; once in the woman's ward a poor wretched infant saw the light. So there were a few exceptions to the rule; for the founder was a man who had known the poor, and shared their hardships, and was merciful. He had planned it years ago; he had been saving money for it since; he had lived to see it a reality, existent in the streets wherein his early life was spent. He would have no interference with his schemes; to good suggestions as well as bad ones he turned a deaf ear, and ruled the place after his own judgment.

Voluntary contributions were not turned away, occasionally in hard-times were solicited by advertisement; but those who were most generous with their gifts had no voice in its management. Pious Puseyitish ladies thought lay sisters might be a comfort to many; stout old gentlemen advocated soup; sensitive people softer beds; clergymen a sermon every evening at nine to keep those dead beat with toil awake a little longer than necessary. John Dell was for one prayer—he'd say it himself, if Owen liked, in the evening after the supper had been given, or in the morning before breakfast—but Owen would have the place nothing more than a refuge.

"Let all religions and no religion at all enter here," said Owen; "when they want prayer, they know where to find it. I will not have my charity a mask in this place."

So "The Help" might have been improved in its way, but its founder was an obstinate man. He had his faults of management, like other practical, well-meaning people, but the broad result was good, and he was content. In the first two months of its start, Owen supported it entirely from his

own purse ; when contributions began to flow in, he was ever the greatest giver ; his pride was in being its founder and its chief support.

"The good in the man will work its way somewhere," was John Dell's opinion ; "perhaps it's only another way of being religious after all."

And consoling himself with this opinion, he would not preach at Owen. Perhaps he was not very far from the truth, for true religion is something more than high-sounding verbiage—and good works, if not salvation, are a step towards it, if the worker be earnest and humble at his task.

Owen's heart was in his work—he was ever anxious to extend the sphere of its influence ; to purchase more room, and give more comfort to the class who sought shelter. Mr. Isaac Cherbury—whose head still continued improving by the way, despite the knowledge of Owen's engagement to Mary—spoke of "The Help" one evening at Oaklands. He was a quiet grave man enough, but he was no longer lugubrious, and was more of a son to his mother. If he had ever dreamed of proposing to his mother's *protégée*, he bore his disappointment well, and was still interested in Mary, and enjoyed her society.

"You are open to contributions, I hear, Mr. Owen?"

"Yes ; every man has a right to share in a great and good work."

"Will you accept this, please?" and Mr. Cherbury passed across the table a cheque which Owen put in his pocket, and did not think of looking at till the following day, when, to his surprise, he found it filled in for five hundred pounds. A liberal donation, and one scarcely to be expected from one who had been ever careful with his money. Perhaps his head has betrayed him, thought Owen ; so he wrote to Mr. Cherbury, enquiring if so large an amount were really intended, and in due course came back the answer.

"I am interested in the cause," he wrote, and therefore Owen handed it to the common funds, and thought he *might* make Mr. Cherbury out in time, if he were fortunate to live long enough.

That was a happy time with Owen—his heart was light, though his brain was busy. From the cares of business, from the study of "The Help," he could turn to the pleasant retreat at Ansted, and in Mary's society find comfort and peace. It was pleasant to feel that there was no truer heart beating for him than hers, no one in the world who would ever love him and understand him like as she did. Love had had its birth in her childhood, and grown with her growth ; but a step from the

child's love to the pure, unspeakable passion which goes beyond self, and has made heroines innumerable since the world began. Mary had made the step, and full of trust in the future, was even more happy than Owen. For she was a woman who could be grateful for happiness, and in the fullness of her heart remember the great Giver.

It was strange that with her greater peace of mind much of her light spirits abandoned her. She was more silent and thoughtful, as though the future duties of the new life with Owen struck her as a task to be thought over, or to be set about earnestly, almost reverently. There was a fear too, at times, to steal on her, softly, imperceptibly, the faint shadow to the felicity too deep for words—the fear lest Owen's happiness should not be as lasting as her own. He was clever, and older than she; he might grow tired of her, fancy she did not sympathise sufficiently in his pursuits, or, growing absorbed in them, make her, whom he loved so much now, ever a second consideration. Even as it was, she fancied now and then he looked upon her as a child still; caressed and talked to her as if she were still the Mary he had left in Mrs. Cutchfield's cottage. He never sought her advice, related his business stories, his trials, vexations, or successes of the day. He studied more to please her, and to shut out all concern from her—to see her thoughtful made him very anxious.

Was she too young to be his helpmate, companion, and comforter? she asked herself occasionally, and even once she timidly put the same question to him.

"Why do you ask, Mary?" he said.

"Because I fancy sometimes the thought crosses you. I know in the bright days I shall make you happy. Do you fear my power in the obscure ones?"

"No."

"I fancy you must have once loved somebody very different from me, and now I am chosen by way of contrast. A staid, clever some one, whose strong mind could have aided you in the battle of life better than the little girl's you have chosen."

"I have chosen for the best, Mary."

"Miss Dell would have made you a better wife. Why were you not fond of her before Mr. Glindon stepped forth?"

"I don't know. Fate, which knew what was best, was keeping you in store for me, Mary."

Mary was not quite so certain on that point, and held fast to the subject from which Owen would have drawn her away.

A curious subject for her to cling so closely to, and a subject to be remembered by them both in the days that were stealing towards them.

"Do you know, Owen, I also fancy at times that the real wife is yet to come in your way—her with whom you would be more contented than me. Should she cross your path, will you tell me?"

"Why?"

"Because I should like you to be happy—because——"

"Because in fostering my happiness you will not study your own," cried Owen, pressing her to his side; "my dear Mary, now and for ever believe my life is in your hands, and only you can gladden it!"

"By every means in my power, Owen, even by resigning you, if by that means I add to your peace."

"By that means you will shut me out in the darkness. Let us reason no more over impossible events."

It was only once during their engagement that they allowed so heavy a shadow to fall, and a word of Owen's sent it far away to the background. They would not have been a model couple had they maundered much over the evils that might be in store for them. Owen was sanguine, and Mary was but thoughtful, lest the present bliss should flash away from her view.

All the long summer and autumn, till the winter, which set in fiercely and early that year, flowed the even current of this engagement. Owen had only to wait for the spring, and then a house of his own, and the bright face of his wife at his side.

Owen's efforts with "The Help" were doubled in the winter-time—on an improvident poor the winter always presses hard. To the new harbour of refuge from the frost-bitten streets, streamed the naked and hungry; Owen and those who assisted him working hard in the cause. Owen was there during the winter almost every day—he had found two trustworthy servants, male and female, for the separate departments, but he was ever solicitous himself concerning the comfort of the needy. He took a strange interest, it was observed, in every boy who sought the refuge—it always seemed to pain him to turn a child back to the streets.

"Men and women are better able to shift for themselves, but the boy soon grows reckless and desperate. Cast adrift, he loses energy, and floats away on the waters, where never a rescue may come; as a right word may change him, so a wrong word, an evil example, will add to the temptations around. Keep the boys here if you can," was the injunction,



"and speak kindly to them so that they may come again, and prefer this place to the streets."

And amongst the boys who made it home, Owen passed with his friendly words and his one injunction to keep honest—more than once telling them that part of his own story, which might apply to them and strike home. His watch over his secret had given way to his desire to benefit those whom he had resembled in his youth—he would have no preacher at "The Help," but he would encourage sinking hearts after his own method. And it was only to the boys he talked, and only the boys who knew him. So Owen was happy, in more ways than one : he was doing good, and the result in more than one instance encouraged him to persevere—John Dell was right, it was Owen's way of being religious. Not the best, or the wisest, or the most satisfactory, to anyone but himself, but still a religion prompted by feelings he could scarcely gauge the depth of.

One November evening, Owen was surprised to find a lady visitor at "The Help." It was against his rules ; for visitors, more especially lady visitors, were an abomination to him.

"Half of them have no sense, and the other half are only curious to see what a medley of humanity can be gathered together by one common necessity. I will have no visitors," was Owen's answer to all applicants for admission. It was natural, therefore, that Owen should frown a little at receiving the intelligence of a lady "in-doors"—of a lady who would receive no denial, and who, having stated herself a friend of Mr. Owen's, had pushed her way to the woman's department.

He was confronting the lady a few minutes afterwards, and his anger left him at recognising the niece of John Dell. He had not seen her for close on seven years, and he drew his breath a little at the change in her. Dell had told him that she was altered, that the country air did not seem to agree with her very well, but he had not expected to see so pale a face, or one quite so marked with care.

"Mrs. Glindon," he said, extending his hand ; "surely it is Mrs. Glindon?"

"Do you find it hard to recognise an old friend?"

"N—no," said Owen, with some little hesitation ; "but you are changed, and I was not aware you were in London."

"Yes, and in London for good now. Arthur has given up country practice, and thinks there are better opportunities in London. I suppose he knows best," with a sigh that did not escape Owen.

"He is Dr. Glindon, I hear, now."

"Yes ; he has been practising as a physician for these last two years."

"And the boy—is he well?"

"Not quite well, thank you ; he is in the country, for his health's sake," said she. "Have you seen Mr. Glindon yet, Owen?"

"No ; is he at your uncle's?"

"Yes ; he has promised to wait for me there. I was anxious to see 'The Help' before I joined him. This is a great work of yours, Owen ; it must assist at their direst need many unfortunates."

"I am of the lower orders, and can guess the struggles of the children of the streets—you learned all my story, Mrs. Glindon, on the night we parted?"

"Yes."

The night they parted was a painful retrospect to Ruth ; she did not care to dwell upon it, or to enlighten Owen concerning the after-incidents, of which he was ignorant.

"Owen, I have a favour to ask of you," she said.

"It has only to be asked."

"Will you let me visit here occasionally—try my influence on the poor women who seek this shelter in their desolation?"

"I have an objection to their being too much preached to on their sins ; this is not a meeting-house, and no sermons are wanted," he said, lightly.

"Ah ! Owen."

"But I can trust you, Ruth ; for you know how to use the right word discreetly," added he. "I have no fear that even a look will mar my efforts, or that in the work undertaken your services might not be priceless. I have only feared officious, well-meaning, blundering people in my way ; you I can always trust."

"Thank you."

"You are what I may never be—a true Christian."

"No, Owen—only a weak woman," corrected she, "with all the faults and failings common to my sex in general."

"May I ask if you have mentioned to Doctor Glindon your desire to assist at 'The Help'?"

"Of course. And he has no objection to urge," said Ruth. "He is aware that it has always been a great desire of mine to raise the condition of the poor. My life like yours began with them, Owen."

"The poor are often ill and fever-stricken, and you have a child to care for."

"Do you think I've forgotten my boy, then?" exclaimed Ruth.

"It is not likely."

"My little boy is delicate, and the London air would kill him. It has been a great trial to me to leave him behind in the country—but it was Arthur's wish."

Owen guessed there was a story connected with her boy—she changed colour so ; a story in which her heart had been tried and wrung, perhaps, for she was not the Ruth of old times. Had she made a false step in marrying Arthur Glinndon, as he had feared once?—had the vision ended, and the reality proved itself unprofitable? In love-matters the best and wisest of women are likely to be misled—might not Ruth have chosen for the worst?

"It will be quite an excitement for me, Owen ; and I will not weary your people by visiting the place too frequently. Arthur thinks I study my child too much, and fret too needlessly about him—so I have given him up for three or four weeks as an experiment. And now my own mistress, with Arthur seldom at home, I seek a distraction—is it an honest one?"

"Yes," Owen answered, absently.

"And it is a compact—I am to have the right of entry here?"

"To be sure," said he ; "when shall the first official visit be made?"

"It is uncertain," she answered ; "leave me to choose my own time. We shall not meet very often, for my visits will be chiefly of a morning, when you have your own business to attend to."

"Are you going direct to your uncle's?" asked Owen.

Ruth replied in the affirmative, after a moment's hesitation that our hero failed to remark.

"We will proceed thither together, if you will wait one moment for me."

Ruth could not say her time would not allow her to wait, and she had never been one very ready at an excuse. She would have preferred, however, proceeding to her uncle's unescorted—she did not know why, except that Arthur was occasionally a little strange, could not always hide the signs of a jealous nature peering up from the surface. And little things affected him more than they used—he was even more irritable with her !—and seven years might not have altered his feelings with regard to Owen. Still, Arthur was her husband now, and had no right to be jealous ; and Owen, of whom he had been distrustful, was shortly to be married to Mary Chickney.

They repaired to Kennington together, Owen talking of

his ward during the journey—what a dear, amiable, lovable being she had become! He could talk to Ruth enthusiastically concerning her, for not a trace of the old passion was left in his breast. Old loves die out, and from the ashes rise the newer and more true—was it possible that this grave-looking matron at his side had been ever his first love?

Arthur Glindon and John Dell were waiting for them in the parlour. The former rose as they entered, and seemed inclined to bow stiffly towards our hero, who would have no more frigidity, but shook him by the hand. Glindon was looking more old and care-worn than Owen had expected to find him; there was less colour on his cheeks, and more of a waxen cast about the face. There was a restlessness in his manner, too, that particular evening—the result of a mild sort of lecture he had been receiving from his uncle-in-law.

"Well, Ruth, my dear," said Dell, rising with alacrity to meet his niece, "how many ages since I saw you last, I wonder?"

He folded her in his arms and kissed her, and then held her at arms' length and earnestly surveyed her.

"You've been worrying yourself!" he said, bluntly.

"I have been alarmed a little concerning my boy's health."

"But you have your husband's assertion that there is no danger. What fidgety beings you women are!"

"Still his health is delicate, uncle, and he is away from his mother."

"It is best for the mother and for him," interposed Glindon; "we were compelled to return to town, and the boy's health would certainly not permit him to accompany us just then. I think, after all, you would be happier with him than me, Ruth."

There was the slightest contraction of the high, white forehead as he spoke. It was an old grievance, evidently, that mother's love for their child. He was second now to her boy; the foremost place in her heart was no longer his—and absence did not even alter the case.

"If he were well, it would not matter so much, Arthur," she said, half reproachfully.

"Ah! it would be all the same, I fear," he answered, carelessly.

"Aren't you well?" said Dell, turning round on him.

"Pretty well, thank you—why do you ask?"

"Because you don't seem satisfied; and an unsatisfied man has generally something the matter with him."

"I'm right enough." And Glindon forced a smile of composure.

"I have been lecturing your young gentleman here, Ruth," said Dell, when they were seated; "he must consider me his father, with a right to say a word now and then. I scold Owen occasionally."

"Ah! he is a favourite son," said Glindon.

"He listens to reason sometimes, Glindon."

"And I don't, then?"

"Well, I don't see the impression it makes."

"May I ask the subject of the lecture, uncle?" enquired Ruth, after a nervous glance in her husband's direction.

"The old subject on which I have told him my mind a dozen times," said Dell; "an essay on that musty old proverb concerning the rolling-stone that gathers no moss. Back in London again, he fancies he might do better somewhere else, just as he fancied the hospital berth was everything till he obtained it. He thinks he can find a friend at Court to procure him an appointment abroad."

"He has been speaking of it to me," said Ruth.

"Well, one can get heartily tired of medicine and sick patients," said Glindon; "and if I could drop in for an appointment under Government, it would be a change."

Always harping on change—ever restless and dissatisfied. The reigning fault when we left Arthur Glindon last, striving with all his might to secure Ruth's love to himself, and to repair the injustice he had done it—always looking forward to some great prize awaiting him in the future! Had the restless fever affected his love for Ruth—the highest prize he had ever striven to win—and was he growing tired of her? It is a rule governing natures a shade more unworthy than his own.

"Am I the only rolling stone in the world incapable of making my fortune, Mr. Dell?" said he; "surely the good luck of Mr. Owen is an incentive to wander."

"Had I seen my way clear in London, Mr. Glindon, I think I should have stayed here."

"But I don't see mine, Mr. Owen."

"Indeed!"

"You are a friend of the family, and may as well know my secret as anyone else. I am not so well off as I was two years ago."

"That's bad news."

"Mr. Dell tells me it's my old habit of giving up—as if I gave up before I had tried my utmost. I think it's my ill-luck which turns my gold, and my golden dreams of success, into withered leaves. If I am a discontented man, it is the fault of the Fate that haunts me, not my own."

His restless hand began to tap the table fretfully. Dell looked towards his niece.

"I thought you could have taught him better than this, Ruth," he said.

"I have tried.

And there was a whole history of trial after trial, of faint success and much discouragement, in her answer. It had never been difficult to make him promise to amend, and Ruth had always buoyed herself with hope concerning him—the trouble lay in the amendment. Had he been still Ruth's lover, more good might have been effected; but the prize was in his hands, and so the old story!

"You're a character precious hard to get at, Glindon," said Dell. "If you were a drunkard, gamester, bully, anything but a fair specimen, one might fix you. You'll keep to London for a time."

"Oh! I'll try it, of course. I'll try anything."

"And if there's any help wanted——"

"Mr. Dell, I have always learned to help myself," was the proud, irritable answer. "I cannot consider anyone my friend who doubts my ability, and offers me money to work my way in the world."

"Ah! there's not many of your opinion," was the quiet answer.

"I would not take a penny of any man to save me from starving," said Glindon, glancing across the table at Owen, as though he expected that small offer of assistance to come from his direction.

No one replying to this, Glindon subsided into his usual self, and in a few minutes was conversing at his ease with John Dell. Time, and some barriers in his way, had not improved Arthur Glindon's temper—bad tempers never improve as the world goes round with them. Long ago Ruth Glindon had discovered this and been patient, and striven with him. What he would have been without his wife, it is impossible to say. She was the one he still esteemed most in the world—the only one who, by patience and argument, could change many a rash intention; but it was up-hill work, and her spirit was breaking with the effort. John Dell had seen it two years since; Owen, an observer in his way, guessed half the secret in that night of their reunion. He could see that Glindon was a jealous man, jealous of his wife's love for the child, of the child's natural preference for the mother, secretly jealous even of Owen, because he was John Dell's partner, and John Dell, in his absence, had sounded his praises, and indirectly offered him as a model to

copy. Ever a distasteful personage would this Arthur Glindon be to Owen—never a friend. They might meet, shake hands, and exchange greetings; but there would be never any real sympathy between them—fragments of the old opposing element might be floating round them now, for what they knew of the matter.

Owen turned to Ruth. They had not met for many years, and he had much to tell her, and to thank her for her care of his ward, before Mrs. Cherbury raised her to greatness. Ruth, he fancied, was slightly embarrassed at first, but she became animated over past associations, until Glindon's very unamiable expression of countenance warned her of the ruling passion.

Then the conversation, with quiet, womanly tact, was led to a general topic, in which John Dell and Glindon took part. And presently, by some adroit change of partners, Dell and his niece were conversing together, and Owen was left to discourse with Glindon, or leave it alone, as the humour seized him.

Owen, in the spur of the moment, was inclined to leave it alone, but he resisted the desire, and exchanged a few words with his old rival. For Ruth's sake, for John Dell's, he would sink, if possible, his unnatural antipathy. Surely Glindon was not so hard to bear with, or Ruth's marriage with him was a mystery.

But there are many sides to a character, and to a person he disliked, Arthur Glindon ever turned his sharpest facet. Besides, he was envious of Owen's success in the world, as we have intimated, and as Owen had presently to discover.

In his heart lurked a species of resentment against Owen, which was new—an idea that John Dell should have offered him the partnership in lieu of waiting for our hero. He was his niece's husband, he was not getting on well in the world, he was fond of change, and had no objection to become rich. Mr. Dell might have made him the offer at least. He was tired of medicine, and engineering seemed easy enough—or rather the management of an engineering firm, with John Dell to look after the practical part. And Dell had passed him by, and chosen him whom, of all others in the world, he most objected to.

"You are a fortunate man, Mr. Owen," said he, after they had conversed for some time on the business—"one of the few who rise in the world, to counterpoise the many who fall. Years ago I was foolish enough to look down upon you—now from the heights, what a giant you have become!"

"I was low enough once, if you remember," Owen could not resist saying.

"A shopkeeper's boy, when I was walking the hospitals and dreaming of what a clever fellow I should be."

"Lower, infinitely lower, than a boy at a greengrocer's," said Owen. "Surely Doctor Glindon has not forgotten that?"

"I don't keep a book of your antecedents," said Glindon, nettled at the fierce look in the eyes of our hero.

"No matter," said Owen, "we are living in the present. Sneer at my past if you like—believe what you like concerning it—I have risen above it."

"Have I expressed a doubt to the contrary?"

"Your doubts belonged to the time when I was Mr. Cherbury's clerk," said Owen. "I fancied from your tone they might exist still."

"I don't understand you."

"I wish you did not," muttered Owen.

"Pray explain!" and Glindon, despite his irritable tendencies, looked interested.

"You expressed a doubt of—of my honesty, seven or eight years ago, to my employer," said Owen; "the result was my dismissal, or my resignation, which you please to consider it."

"I expressed nothing of the kind, Mr. Owen," said he; "more, you mystify me immensely!"

Owen looked steadily into the other's face, which was not likely to conceal anything. He read surprise therein—no desire at concealment—and he held out his hand.

"I have misjudged you for many years, Dr. Glindon."

"Very likely!" was the cool response.

Glindon retired into his shell, and took no heed of Owen's hand, that was a moment afterwards very hastily withdrawn. Had their hands met then, fairly and honestly, much that followed afterwards might have been avoided. A fair explanation at that time might have rendered them better friends, and altered at least the future of one. But Glindon was a jealous man, and Owen was quick to resent.

They parted that night after the old fashion; in all their meetings there had been never any love lost.

"A cold-hearted upstart, there is no taking to," thought Owen, as he watched his departure with Ruth.

"I *must* hate that man!" muttered Glindon.





## CHAPTER II.

### THE HONEST DISTRACTION.

**A**RTHUR GLINDON thought a great deal of that appointment abroad, concerning which John Dell had expressed his opinion. He could see his way to distinction very clearly, if once taken in hand by a paternal government. Let him begin only at the foot of the ladder, and his energy would carry him upwards. He should not flag in a service where there would be always something to look forward to. Medicine was a dead level to him; he had become a physician, and could advance no further; the degree he had won was an empty honour, that he cared nothing for. It was one dreary round of visiting sick and fanciful people day after day, and he was tired of it heartily.

Diplomacy was his forte; he was a clever fellow—no one knew that better than he—he would be a useful servant to the public; he could see the laurels waiting for him.

Impressed with these ideas, and with many ideas similar in their nature, Glindon courted the friend, whose influence with a second friend might influence friend No. 3, to persuade *his* friend, who had the giving of the appointment, to think of Arthur Glindon. And we know sufficient of Glindon's character to be aware that a prize before him was an incentive which forced down the barriers in his way, or surmounted them. Half the energy in his own profession would have again raised him a step, but his ambition was directed to another quarter now, and he braced his energies to the task, and went on. Disappointments and rebuffs he met in his progress, but they daunted him not; his patients, finding themselves neglected, turned from him, but he was too deeply concerned in the new chase to care for the falling off of his fees; every wheel that could possibly be turned by ingenious

tact or sturdy persistence, he moved in his favour, and having the power, when he chose, of ingratiating himself with new friends, he certainly advanced nearer to the object in view.

It may be imagined that Ruth Glindon did not receive much attention during his pursuit of government honours—that she suffered, like his patients, from neglect.

Their house in George Street, Euston Square, seldom contained Arthur Glindon—early in the morning, or at a late hour of the night, his footsteps only echoed there. Ruth was left to pass the hours as she best might. Arthur might have spared her at that time to visit the North, and see her child again, but his jealous temper would not allow her that privilege—the boy was becoming accustomed to her absence, why upset him again by appearing at his side? She knew that he was in good hands—why was she ever so restless and dissatisfied? Surely *he* was troubled enough, why not solace him with her wishes for his success? The time might hang a little heavily on her hands; but she was a woman who had not been used to company, and could endure all for a little while. Only a little while, and then life abroad, and the real life for which he was destined beginning for them both.

Ruth Glindon was patient and uncomplaining; had even a hope that it was all for the best, and that possibly Arthur was more fitted for a stirring life—there was not half so much chance of settling down. Keep the waters disturbed, and give him something to battle against, and he would ever float in their midst, confident in his own powers of success. The house was very lonely without him, but it was only for a time, as he had said, and he did not bind her to George Street; there was her father in London, why not call upon him?—there was her uncle, and though he, Glindon, did not care much for *his* society, he knew Ruth did. Mr. Dell was too fond of lecturing for him—just as if *he* had a right to interfere!

Ruth always defended her uncle from Glindon's acrimonious attacks; and Glindon, to do him justice, generally succumbed, and acknowledged himself in the wrong. For he loved Ruth still, in his way—with a capricious, fretful kind of affection, that harassed her more than it gave her comfort. Winning her to himself after years of perseverance, he had not wholly cast her aside—her patience touched him at times, and her advice he would even occasionally take. She was an ornament to his house, the mother of his child; she was an accomplished woman, and never wearied him—oh, yes, he loved her. All the old romantic nonsense had vanished away, of course—he was getting on for forty now, and it was time.

But he esteemed Ruth very much, and kept her close to himself, lest others should esteem her also. In the early days after their marriage, he had been jealous of a glance towards her—but he had outlived that nonsense !

Why, when Ruth spoke to him very warmly and enthusiastically of "Owen's Help," although Owen, his old rival, had founded it, he said, frankly, that it was a noble institution ; and when she expressed a wish to visit the place occasionally, having a belief in the good to be worked there, he had given his consent at once. True, she was beginning to look pale with so much confinement to the house, and perhaps to fret a little at times concerning the child—and "Owen's Help" might be a safety-valve. She had had always an absurd idea about doing good ; in the country she had been always at the old women's houses, or forming Bible-classes, and perhaps she missed the excitement—by all means visit "Owen's Help," and see what good might be done there before they left England. And Ruth, deeming it "an honest distraction," as she had termed it to Owen, visited "The Help" once or twice a week, and did her best for the poor suffering humanity that sought its shelter there.

Ruth spoke of her labours to Glindon, when he had fully related all his own struggles for the day—the interviews he had had, and the promises he had obtained—and Glindon listened to her animated narrative, and thought the change was doing her good. Always during the recital the question arose, "Did you see Mr. Owen?" and as the answer was generally in the negative, Glindon was satisfied.

For he would not have cared to hear Ruth had seen that fellow too often—his estimate of human nature was not a high one—and though Owen was engaged now, it might be possible to fall twice in love with the same woman. Besides, he hated Owen—he hated all men who had been more successful than himself—and though he might not mistrust Ruth, he had no faith in John Dell's partner.

Mrs. Glindon's father's place of business was in Lambeth—a quiet, old-fashioned tobacconist's in the Westminster Road, with a branch trade in walking-sticks and newspapers. Proceeding to "The Help" on her new mission, it was Ruth's custom to call and see 92, who with his partner appeared to be always very contented and comfortable. We may say here that Ruth was not aware that the partner's name was Chickney—he had taken the euphonious name of Brown, and was a friend of Owen's—for Tarby had thought it necessary to keep that information as secret as possible, for his daughter's sake ; and 92 was a fair hand at a secret, notwithstanding his loquacity.

John Dell and Owen were alone aware of Tarby's return to England ; and from his old Lower Marsh friends, who might have recognised him despite his extra fourteen years, Tarby kept carefully aloof. He had served his time, and had no reason to hide himself ; but he was a respectable member of society now, and had no leaning towards ancient acquaintances. He had purchased the tobacco business jointly with 92, and Dell & Co. was painted over the shop front, and he and his partner jogged on amicably together. Tarby considered himself settled in life and business ; he was as happy as he ever expected to be ; he should have liked to hear that daughter of his say " Father," but he had sworn No to that, for her sake. Sometimes he felt a wavering, and then a strong desire to rush to Oaklands and claim her ; and then his love for her was restrained by his wish to keep her name pure. When Owen told him Mary was to be his wife one day, he felt as close to happiness as he ever had done in his life : he dashed the tears from his eyes, and seized Owen's hands, and hoped God would bless their marriage.

" I've hoped such a thing more than once, Owen, and thought it allus far too good to be true. You'll be her guardian then for life, lad ? "

" Yes, Tarby—for life."

" It's like a blessed dream."

" I have been talking with John Dell about you, Tarby—he and I have arrived at one opinion."

" What's that ? " he asked eagerly.

" That on our marriage day you sink the stranger, and boldly tell your story—hers is a heart easily touched, Tarby—and all this is very hard on you."

" She's a lady—I'm a returned convict, Owen ; it can't be," said Tarby—" the disgrace would kill her."

" I have considered it in many ways and can see no real hindrance to it, if she marry me. I am no new friend, Tarby."

" Well, it is different, aint it ? " said Tarby. " Of course if she married a gentleman—not that you aint a gentleman, and the best of 'em—you know what I mean—I could never have faced him, or given him a handle to sname her with, if so be as they ever quarrelled. It *is* different, and I'll take three months to think of it, Owen."

At the end of that period Tarby revived the subject.

" I can't make up my mind, Owen ; it don't seem fair on her."

" I believe she will be the happier for it."

" She'll be your wife then certainly. Owen, what a glorious

day that was for me when I lit on you at Markshire Downs."

"Where's the glory of it?" asked Owen, laughing.

"I see it all plain—it's like a book to me now, and the large print in it tells me what to be grateful for. Supposing my poor old lady had not been so pressing, or my hard temper had sent you away, where would Mary have been? I should have met the same fate; Mary would have been left with no Owen to take care of her—only the workus gates to shut in upon her like a trap. Well, things come round queer enough; but I can thank God that it is—as it is, Owen."

"And without your help, Tarby, at that time, what would have become of me?"

"Ah! you've something to thank God for, too."

"True."

Owen felt the sting that was unintended by Tarby—the reproach that lurked in his words. How much more to be thankful for than this man; and how much less grateful! Well, well, his better time was coming now, he thought.

"Lor', Owen, to think of it all now. Talk of a dream—it's fifty dreams one within the other. Supposing any one had said to me on the Downs, 'You see that ragged little cove yonder—he's to be your son-in-law,' I should have knocked him down with disgust. And now, Owen, it's the proudest thought of my life, and I can't sleep for it."

Owen led the subject round to Mary again; he had thought of Tarby's long secret, and that it was time to end it. Tarby, on their wedding-day, should give away his bride, and the snapped links of the chain be once more riveted together.

"You're very good," said Tarby, humbly.

"She will not be a stranger to you *then*."

"How's that?"

"I am going to take Mary one evening to 'The Help'; we shall call here afterwards to see old Mr. Dell."

"You—you don't mean it?" And Tarby turned as white as a sheet.

"Yes, I do."

"Give me another couple of months to prepare for it, or I shall make a fool of myself, and tell all."

And in two months' time Mary Chickney went with Owen to "The Help," and thence to Dell and Co.'s. She could scarcely understand Owen's wish to take her there; she had only seen Ruth's father once in her life. Certainly he was an old friend of Owen's, and, therefore, should be a friend of hers.

It was a very short interview, for Owen would not test

Tarby's powers of endurance too far ; but it was sufficiently long to make Mary think that Mr. Dell's partner was a singular man, with an unpleasant habit of looking at her out of the corners of his eyes. Still she liked him a little, for he had brought her good tidings once. She had always fancied Owen had sent him as a pioneer that day of their reunion, and so gave Tarby credit for more tact than he deserved.

She thought him a very reserved man, or a very shy one, and that he was afflicted with palsy when she shook hands with him ; but Owen told her afterwards that it was only his way, and his way did not affect her much.

Owen and Mary began in the winter time to pay more frequent visits to London. Owen had settled on his house between John Dell's and the business, and he wanted Mary's advice concerning the furniture.

The shop in the Westminster Road was never passed in their London visits, and Tarby became more accustomed to the sight of his daughter. Still he was always reserved, and strangely respectful to her ; always glancing at her wistfully, and wondering within himself how she would bear the revelation. He did not believe it would shock her very much, or that she wouldn't be even like a daughter to him some day ; but he still withheld his answer to Owen : " Leave it a little while longer, he was thinking of it every day."

So, calling frequently at the firm of Dell and Co., tobaccoists, Owen and Mary, early one winter's evening, met Ruth Glindon, to whom we revert again after a round-about fashion. The meeting between Mary and Ruth was a warm one, and there was much to say concerning the Cherburys and their past days together at Ansted.

" Next week I hope to be at Oaklands," said Ruth. " Arthur has accepted an invitation for us to dine there."

" So Mrs. Cherbury has told me," answered Mary.

" I hope Arthur will soon be a little more free," added Ruth, with a sigh.

" Is he still sanguine about that appointment?" asked Owen.

" Yes ; and he made a great step yesterday towards it. I believe it is almost promised him."

" I am glad to hear it," said Owen.

Ruth did not know whether she was glad or not, for she made no answer to Owen's expressions of good-will.

" Have you been to ' The Help,' Owen?"

" Yes. They have been compelled to turn a hundred away already. When I saw the streets alive with people I was disheartened at my own work, and at the little relief

it seemed able to afford. I left your uncle there bargaining for the hire of some stables for a night or two for the men. Entirely on his own account, Mrs. Glindon—quite an opposition establishment.”

“Do you think I shall be able to meet him before he goes?” asked Ruth, eagerly.

“I think it likely. But, Mrs. Glindon, it is late for a visit in that direction alone.”

“I am not afraid,” was the reply. “I was there last night at a later hour.”

“Indeed!” said Owen.

“It’s a black slum for a lady,” said 92, “and Owen’s quite right in his astutions. Where’s my stick, Brown? I’ll see Ruth to ‘The Help.’”

“No, no—I would rather not to-night,” said Ruth, in a confused manner. “You must excuse me, father. I am so well known, and could not think of taking you out of your way. Perhaps Arthur will meet me there, too. Good-night.”

And very precipitately Ruth hurried away, leaving Owen perplexed at her demeanour, so strangely in contrast to her usual orderly habits. He set it all down to Glindon, however. There had been some little quarrel between husband and wife, and Ruth was still agitated concerning it.

But Owen was wrong in his judgment; and as it is time for us to throw a light on the mystery, we will follow Ruth to “The Help.”

Owen was right, the streets were alive with people. The frost had swooped suddenly down upon the wanderers that early winter, and hindered out-door work, and run up the price of provisions, and filled the place with hungry faces. Round the workhouse gates of London that night were huddled crowds of applicants for admission. To all such refuges for the destitute as men like Owen had formed in different parts of London, there streamed the poverty-hunted and forsaken—steadily, unceasingly on, every hour increasing the number, and speaking more of the misery at the heart of a great city.

Towards “The Help,” formed by Owen, men, women and children toiled and went back, baffled by the news that no more room could be given, and met others as gaunt and haggard as themselves, who would not take such news for gospel, but went on to be baffled in their turn. Near “The Help,” crouching on door-steps, or leaning against the house-walls, lingered a few despairing ones, who had come thither as a last chance, and had given up when told it was too late.

One woman, in particular, sat heaped on the pavement, unable or refusing to move another inch, and deaf to all the remonstrances of a policeman, to whom the refuse of "The Help" was, to use his own words, "the cussedest torment of his life." Half-a-dozen beggars and thieves were interested in the dispute, and waited attendance on the law—it was nothing new, but it whiled away the time a little, cold as it was.

"I'm done for, and can't move," moaned the woman ; "and what's more, I was told to come by the lady."

"But they're full at 'The Help,'" remonstrated the officer.

"So much the worse."

"And you'd better get up—the people can't pass you."

"I sha'n't get up. Let 'em go in the road !"

Ruth pushed her way through the crowd, and looked down on the woman, evidently recognising her.

"You were here last night—do you remember me ?"

The woman looked up.

"You're the lady that was kind ?"

"I was at 'The Help' last night."

"You've brought me all the way back here, and see how I'm served."

"I'm very sorry—will you come with me ?"

"I must have rest—my God, I must have rest !" moaned the woman.

"It isn't all sham, Ma'am," said the policeman, turning to Ruth.

"No ; she was weak and ill last night, and might have stayed there another day, if she had wished. Will you come with me ?" she repeated.

The woman scrambled slowly to her feet, and Ruth offered her arm as a support.

"Where are you going to take me ?"

"Only a little way."

The woman walked with difficulty, and they went slowly away, the outcasts of "The Help" watching them. Ruth was known to most of them already, and "the lady" was muttered here and there, often in a reverent whisper, strange to hear. Amongst the crowd there were naturally some discontented ones—it was not the general rule to be grateful—and, "see what favourites are made of some of us," was muttered more than once.

The woman caught the words, and said with a sickly smile,

"It's odd to be called a favourite, Ma'am."



A moment afterwards she stopped, and exclaimed in fiercer tones,

"Where are you taking me?—I have your word—it was said solemnly, mind!"

"Across the road here; I have hired a room for you opposite."

"You thought I'd come, then?"

"You gave me your word."

The woman scoffed at her word being trusted; but Ruth took no notice.

"I am here to time," she said, "and you were a little before it, or I might have saved your applying at 'The Help.'"

"You never intended me to go there?"

"No."

"Why didn't you say so last night?"

"You were suspicious of me."

"Because my own fool's tongue betrayed me, and you were mighty sharp to catch up my words. Well, it's a wonder you see me."

"Why?"

"Because I thought of drowning myself—that's why!"

"Hush!—hush!"

Ruth shuddered at her answer—had she known how long that intention had been considered in all its bearings, she need not have been greatly alarmed.

"I did not know whose 'Help' it was, when I stumbled upon it last night," said she; "and it's 'Owen's Help,'—I heard the people saying so."

"Yes—Owen's—your son's."

"It's hard grudging help without kind words, then!"

"No."

"The boy means well, but he's awfully hard. Where's the place?—I shall drop dead in a minute. I'm worn to death, and you drive me mad about the boy. I've your solemn promise?"

"It shall be kept till you release me from it."

"That's well—you're one of the good sort."

They were at the door of a little house half-way down the street, and at Ruth's summons a poorly-attired woman, with a baby in her arms, responded.

"Does this belong to 'The Help' too?" the woman asked.

"The up stairs room is hired sometimes, when there is a very pressing case, like yours."

"Why is mine a pressing case?—because I might die if I were left in the streets?"

"You require rest," said Ruth, evasively.

"I belong to the streets—I've a right to die in 'em. I don't think I can go up all those stairs."

"Will you rest a moment?" asked the woman with the baby—"I will bring a chair."

"Owen never comes here, does he?" whispered the other.

"No."

"Let me get up stairs, then—now, your arm again."

Slowly and painfully, with Ruth's assistance, Owen's mother dragged her way to the front bedroom, and sat herself shivering in the first chair.

"I've come up here to die, I do believe."

"I hope not," answered Ruth.

"About the best thing that could happen p'raps—what's this?"

"Water."

"Put it on the mantelpiece—I'll have some presently. I never did care much for water. I say" (very eagerly), "you won't leave me to-night?"

"I must return home in an hour or two—my husband will be anxious about me. The woman of the house will attend to your wants."

"And to-morrow?"

"I shall see you once more."

"And never a word to Owen: it would kill me to face him again—never again!"

And she broke into a second shivering fit more violent than the preceding.

Ruth sat on the edge of the bed, watching her narrowly. The woman had changed since the preceding night—and then she seemed to have her days numbered on her face. A woman utterly worn out with toil, and privation, and drink; who might not live another week, Ruth had thought on their first meeting—who could not linger far beyond that period, Ruth felt convinced that night.

"Would you like to see a doctor?" Ruth asked, after a long study of her weak, frail sister.

"Doctors are no good for me," she said; "I only want rest—I'm awfully weary."

Ruth did not press the question, for it appeared to irritate the woman. She left her in charge of the supplementary nurse—engaged on special occasions, like the present—and—sent for the doctor, also called in when sickness at "The Help" necessitated.

Mrs. Owen—at this stage of her history we do not care to learn her real name, and Owen has never borne it—felt herself

aggrieved at the appearance of a medical man, and declined to answer any questions that were put to her, and made quite a little fight for her arm when he endeavoured to feel her pulse. But the doctor was a grave, quiet man, and waited his opportunity, and sat watching her face, from which a skilful practitioner gathers so much knowledge.

"She is very ill, Sir?" asked Ruth.

"She is breaking up—she will live seven or eight days, perhaps," was the verdict delivered in the narrow passage of the branch establishment to "Owen's Help."

"There is nothing sudden to be anticipated?"

"Nothing," said he; "I will send round a stimulant. Good-evening."

Ruth remained till Owen's mother was in her bed, then she said.

"Last night you repeated a prayer after me."

"Ah, yes!—don't go on again like that; it was only *fun* of mine. I am weary to death."

"Will you not say it again?"

"Not to-night!"—almost peevishly.

"To-morrow?"

"Yes—to-morrow, then," she answered, clutching at a postponement.

"You will keep your promise?—for I will keep mine," said Ruth.

"It's a bargain."

And the woman turned on her side with a half groan, and was asleep in an instant. She was very weary of the world!





### CHAPTER III.

#### "THE OLD COMPLAINT."

**I**T must be confessed that John Dell's niece deserved a better fate than being linked for life to a man so ill-tempered, jealous, and variable as Arthur Glindon. Owen thought so, and it had long been John Dell's secret opinion.

Still there was no woman more capable of making the best of a bad bargain than Ruth ; no one who could quicker learn resignation and take comfort from adversity. Her fate was no worse than that of being matched to an unappreciative husband—to a man who, full of his own pursuits, had no sympathy for hers—who, busy in the world himself, forgot to make the little world of home he left behind as bright and pleasant as a few words might have done. There are some men like this, as there are some women intolerant and exacting ; wedlock is a lottery, wherein there are a few—just a few—uncomfortable blanks.

Ruth Dell's great mistake in life had been to forgive Arthur Glindon in the very face of her own wisdom on the matter. True, she loved the wretch, and love gets the better of wisdom occasionally ; and as he was earnest and truthful for the time, so her earnestness and truth carried her away and warped her judgment. Still, we repeat, she made the best of it ; she set herself the great task of reforming all her husband's eccentricities, of planning his life for him, and studying in every way to prove that his ideas therein were premature, and his passions misleading ; and if it were too great for her strength, the object of interest being stubborn and often unapproachable, why it has been the fate of many women before her. Most women would have shown more spirit, exhibited a little more of those family discomforts yclept "airs ;"

forgot all about loving and obeying long since—but Ruth was a proud girl, and did not care to own to society how mistaken she had been. She set the good example of hiding her husband's faults with the same veil that concealed the wound in her heart; and, thanks to John Dell's early teaching, there was religion—pure, deep, and unalterable—to sustain her in her hour of trial.

And she had not given up all hope of Glindon—for she was a woman. Nor her love, for she was a true wife and mother. She was looking forward still to the better times beyond the present—Glindon's sanguine nature even affected her own. Each new step that he made might, she thought, render him more content, and if there were times when she doubted, she kept the shadow from him. If he were more than usually abstracted and forgetful of her, there was her child to turn to; and, now the child was away, there seemed suddenly offered to her a great task, in which her whole heart became instantly engaged.

Owen's mother had emerged from the darkness, and sought shelter at "The Help;" in her weakness she had given signs of contrition for much in the past. Her strength was failing her, her life was drawing to a close, and the old wild beast instinct to roam was dying out with her energy. She was a woman who, as we have seen, had snatched fitfully at good, and yet went on defiantly to evil. The tide against her had been ever too strong for her futile efforts to turn back, and those who had tried to save her had their narrow ideas of what was best, and so lost their chance with hers!

Ruth saw all this in the first meeting, when a few incoherent words betrayed who the wanderer was; hence the task of attempting the woman's reformation became a great and worthy effort.

Ruth was earnest and gentle—knew, with a woman's tact, how much one stricken could bear—which was the right word and when was the right time to say it. In their first meeting she had made some impression; in their second, she had engendered confidence; in all that followed there was some progress to be noted.

Owen's mother shrunk very much from Ruth's teaching at first; but Ruth's manner was new, and she was weak unto death. Her son had attempted a moral cure; but he talked of himself, his character, the wrong that had been done him—never of the Saviour who had died for her, of the angels in heaven who would rejoice at her repentance. Somehow she had escaped that teaching till then, or it had been attempted at the top of the teacher's voice, and with annihilating glances.

It was all new to her ; she could remember something of the kind when she was a child, and she had forgotten it till that day. She clung to Ruth at last and repented.

We will not attempt to fathom what would have been the end of this had her strength come back, and with it the old temptation of the streets ; but we believe that Owen's mother would have made a better stand for it, than when Owen took her case in hand. There was more to fight for, she had learned more, and with God's help she might have kept strong to the last. But her reformation was left till the eleventh hour—as some are, and are none the less reformations—and Ruth's task was rewarded and blessed.

Still, the master-passions live on to the end, and the shades of character that have made us stubborn, yielding, proud, or wilful, flicker with the sinking flame. In one thing Owen's mother was firm—that of holding Ruth to the promise to keep her state from her son. In her weakness, her terror of that son was so extreme—the horror of meeting him so great—that Ruth did not dare to press her to the utmost.

"Long ago he told me it was my last chance, and that if I threw it away he had done with me. It's all over between us, and I don't want to see him, and I don't dare to face him. If he came, it would be only to frown, and tell me—what is true enough—how much I have disgraced him. I can see his white face, and his eyes like coals of fire—you must not let him come to me !"

"You are mistaken in him," Ruth would reason ; "he would be ready to forgive everything, and take you to his breast. I, who have known him so long, can answer for him."

"I daren't face him !—I daren't face him !"

"Will you let me tell him how ill you are, and where you are?" pleaded Ruth, later in the week. "I promise you he shall not see you till you wish it—till you hear from him that everything has been long ago forgiven."

"And he sha'n't see me—and you'll tell me every word he says?"

"Yes."

"Tell him to-morrow, then—not to-night, mind," said the mother ; "and if he's not really sorry to get rid of me, not really angry with all I've done and said, tell him to wait until I have thought his words over. But in mercy," catching at Ruth's dress, "not before I send, and am prepared, or the sight of him will send me to my grave, a madwoman. He might have saved me, had he thought more of God and less of himself, eight years ago."

Ruth used her utmost efforts to induce Owen's mother not

to delay till the morrow, but she kept firm to her first assertion.

"Are you afraid I sha'n't last?"

"No; but Owen's message may be of much comfort to you, and Owen himself a blessing."

"Never that!" said the woman, moodily.

"Will you let me go to him?"

"No, no."

"Will you let me send to him?"

"To-morrow."

Owen's mother became so ill and excited that night, betrayed so great a fear that Ruth would leave her and communicate with her son, that Ruth saw to quit the house under any pretence would be to kill her.

"You'll stay till it's all over now," she pleaded, "or at least till the morrow, and then go to Owen yourself? Won't you write to your husband and ask him to spare you for one night?"

Ruth could not find the heart to quit the sufferer—it was neither her duty nor her inclination. She penned a hasty note to her husband, stating that a woman was dying at "Owen's Help," and she had found it impossible to leave—adding a hope that she had not already alarmed him by her lengthened stay. The letter was despatched by special messenger, and reached George Street many hours before the arrival of Doctor Glindon, who ascended his steps as the first hour of the morning was being notified from neighbouring church steeples.

Doctor Glindon had been dining with a friend—half a dozen friends—on a special occasion deserving of a feast. He had obtained his appointment—which was in India—and thus the reward for all his energy in the pursuit had come to him. He was inclined to be elated with his success—not with the wine, for he had not drunk deep, and was ever a temperate man—and he passed into the drawing-room to communicate the glad tidings to his wife, and to receive her congratulations.

He stood surprised for a few minutes at the empty room, and the letter awaiting him in a conspicuous position between the looking-glass and its frame on the mantelpiece; then turning pale with the fear that something had happened to Ruth, he seized the note, and hastily dived into its contents.

Having read the letter, Arthur Glindon relapsed into the easy-chair with a rapidly-contracting brow, and began slowly and savagely a repast on the letter in his hand. To think he

had returned full of the brightest news to find Ruth absent for the night—to think a dying old woman at a refuge should be considered matter of sufficient moment to detain her. Damn every old woman under the sun, for dying at unseasonable hours!

Having cursed and sworn to his heart's content—an operation that appeared to greatly relieve him—he went up stairs to his room. There was no help for it but resignation; it was foolish of Ruth to trouble herself about people who did not belong to her; he was thankful that it could not last much longer. Just a little while, and then he, Ruth and the boy would shake from their feet the dust of a land wherein he had never been happy. He was sorry he had given his consent to Ruth playing the Samaritan at "The Help;" it was natural people should die there sometimes, and give other people a vast deal of trouble. And it was that Owen's "Help;" and perhaps Owen was there also, and interested in the invalid. And *he* had loved Ruth once, although Ruth had been for ever in the dark concerning it; and now one common interest might awaken love in the man's breast again. He did not like Owen—he was one whom he could never trust, and he had always been suspicious of him. Still there was nothing to fear or suspect; it was unlikely Owen would be at "The Help;" and the morrow would soon come. What a fool he was to work himself into a frenzy about nothing. And his common-sense told him it was nothing, and so cooled him.

Satisfied that the woman would die in the night, Giindon awoke the next morning in a better frame of mind, and was disposed to meet Ruth on her return with an amiable countenance. But when Ruth returned not, and the clock on the landing struck hour after hour, and he had eaten his solitary breakfast, which he had delayed till ten in the morning for her, his bad tempers set in again—not the bad tempers of last night, but an entirely new set, manufactured expressly for the occasion, and capable of greater expansion.

He commenced a rapid perambulation to and fro, tramping heavily and monotonously, and shaking everything in the room, even to the windows in the sashes; and having indulged in this exercise for an hour and a half, he seized his hat and ran into the street. He would fetch her back from the refuge, or see if that old woman were not shamming illness, and imposing on his wife. He would read his wife a smart lecture for her inattention, he might almost say her disregard. From that day forth his interdict on Ruth's visits to the accursed institution, which Owen had thought it



necessary to open—from that day forth a tighter rein on Mrs. Glindon. Cab!

Ensnconced in a patent Hansom, Glindon lay back and fumed and anathematised most things that his memory could suggest, "Owen's Help" in particular. Whilst recurring to "The Help" for the twentieth time or so, it struck him that he need not trouble himself to ride thither. Why should he testify such extraordinary concern for Mrs. Glindon, as to arrive in breathless haste to make enquiries concerning her, or allow the people there—possibly Owen amongst them—to think he was uneasy or distrustful? Why should people talk about him at all?—and why should he exhibit more anxiety for the wife than the wife had shown for the husband? He dashed his fist at the trap in the cab's roof with so much suddenness as to frighten the cabman.

"Make for Southwark Road," and he called out John Dell's business address to the driver. He would proceed to the engineering department, and communicate to his uncle-in-law the success of his plans for obtaining that appointment which could alone make him happy, making sure by the way what had become of our hero. If he were not "pottering" about "The Help," offering a hundred excuses to be near Ruth, why, he should be satisfied that his wife was safe, and perhaps justified in attending to the wants of some miserable specimen of humanity. And if Ruth had already reached home, so much the better for her—she would grow concerned about him in her turn, and have a nice long day in George Street all to herself. And it was just possible, he thought vindictively, that he should arrive home very late that night.

He was at the workshops and foundry of Dell and Owen—the many hammers were echoing in the street; the great shaft was smoking vigorously; there were life and activity in the hive into which he stepped. Signs of a young and thriving undertaking met him at each turn—the hosts of men at work, the bustle of the foremen, the pre-occupied look of John Dell, with a pen in one hand and a whole mass of letters in the other, as he came to meet his niece's husband, all bore testimony to it. "This should have been my sphere," thought the discontented man. "I should have been earning my fortune here, instead of being driven by fate from my native land. But a stranger was preferred to the husband of her supposed to be nearest his heart."

"Good-day, Glindon. What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"You are looking pale. Will you step into the counting-house?"

"Thank you."

Glindon followed John Dell, and as he entered the counting-house looked quickly around him.

"Where's Mr. Owen this morning?" he attempted to say in an unconcerned tone.

"He hasn't come yet. Take a seat."

Dell was turning over the letters in his hand to make sure that he had not lost one crossing the yard, or he would have been startled by the sudden change in Glindon's face. Glindon had not been really suspicious before. He had worried himself by what he felt to be his own foolish thoughts; but the first real doubt struck at him like a dagger. Still it might be only a coincidence. It was not likely he would be with Ruth—it was impossible!

"I was not aware your partner was so lax in his business habits."

"Eh?"

Glindon repeated his observation, and Dell's great eyes appeared slowly coming out of their sockets, and over the handful of letters at the visitor. Dell fancied he detected in Glindon the old desire to depreciate Owen, and a sneer at the regular habits of one of whom he had spoken too partially. So he answered very shortly,

"Lax he isn't. Sharp and regular, and unflinching to his share of the work, he always is."

"It's strange!"

"He has some plans to finish at home to-day—a clever idea of his, which is worth considering. But still," with a glance at the counting-house clock, "I did not understand he would be quite so late as this."

"Something wrong at 'The Help,' perhaps?"

"I haven't heard. It would be something very wrong to send for him."

"Some one dying, perhaps?"

"I don't think they would send to Owen at once. He's at home."

"Are you sure?"

"What do you mean?—do you want to see him?" asked Dell; "out with it, Glindon—something is the matter."

"N—nothing. I am only the bearer of good news, and desire all my friends to offer their congratulations. I have gained the appointment."

"In India?" and Dell's countenance lengthened.

"Yes."

"That's bad news for me. I sha'n't congratulate you."

Glindon did not answer. He had turned the current of

Dell's thoughts, but his own flowed on unchangeably, in the dark, deep channel of mistrust. He might have been jealous before, but he had never experienced his present sensations. He might have been angry without a reason very often—now with a cause, what an intensely bitter feeling it was !

"I'm in doubt how the climate will agree with Ruth and her child."

"Oh ! well enough."

"What !—are you going ?"

"Yes, I must hasten home—I've a deal to prepare."

Dell made no effort to stay him. It struck him that Glindon's manner was peculiar ; but the man had been eccentric at times, and Dell was very busy just then. Glindon did not appear to him to be greatly excited over his good fortune — possibly now the goal was reached, he was beginning to think that he might do better at something else. Dell would consider it in the dinner-hour — and he stood at his high desk and spread out his letters carefully, preparatory to answering each in its turn.

Meanwhile, Glindon walked out of the office, re-crossed the yard, and started for Kennington Road and Dell's private residence. Owen was at home, Dell had informed him—it might be so, he prayed it might be so, and he would never suspect a living thing again !

He had no right to suspect anyone—Ruth had been the best and the most faithful of wives—but it was Glindon's nature ever to see darkly.

He went up the steps of John Dell's house very impetuously, as if he would out-walk such awful thoughts as the devil was whispering in his ear, and knocked noisily at the door. The servant-maid who responded looked with some amazement at the white face of the new comer.

"Where's Mr. Owen ?"

"In the front parlour, Sir—with Mrs. Glindon."

"WHAT !" shouted Glindon.

The servant was trying to find the voice which Glindon's impetuous manner had frightened to a low depth in her system, when he thrust her aside, and flung back the door.

Owen and Ruth were standing side by side, and Ruth seemed agitated. The quick eyes of Glindon saw that Owen held her hand, and that Owen was pale, excited, and trembling. The quick ears heard, also,

"You have kept it a secret till now. Oh ! Ruth, do you know what a reproach all my after-life may be ?"

"Ay, and deserves to be !" cried Glindon—"a reproach to be shared by me, and this weak woman here !"

"Are you mad?" said Owen, releasing Ruth's hand, and turning suddenly upon him ; "are you mad?"

"I may be presently !" returned Glindon, "when I have enquired into this mystery, that brings my wife and you in secret conversation here !"

"Arthur?" cried Ruth, "you don't know—you——"

"Madam ! I will come to you for an explanation presently. I insist upon your departure, now and at once. I will not have you here an instant longer !" he cried, with a stamp of his foot.

"You are foolish, Sir !—you are disgracing yourself and me !" said Ruth, indignantly. "You are not sparing one whose troubles are real and severe !"

"I shall be pleased to hear every word in extenuation," said Glindon ; "but not in this house. At your own home—the most fitting place for you and me to discuss the propriety of this visit."

"Arthur !—all this will be your bitterest retrospect some day !"

"Will you leave me to your friend whose feelings you are so anxious to spare ?"

"I will leave you to your better self."

Ruth went out of the house, trembling very much—more ashamed of her husband's excitement than indignant with him. She was sorry that he had betrayed so much anger in an unjust cause before Owen ; but she was not alarmed concerning him. She felt that the explanation was simple, and would satisfy him, however unreasonable he might be ; she would leave him to think how cruel and ungenerous he had been, and, when the moral had struck home to him, she would forgive him. Out of evil even good might arise, and he might be a changed man from that day. She would hurry round to Owen's mother with the son's assuring message, that he bore no enmity towards her, and only yearned to see her again,—and then to her home, and her inconsistent, ungenerous, distrustful husband. She had no fear of a quarrel ensuing between Owen and him. Owen's first words would disarm Glindon, she thought ; and being anxious that the full force of his injustice should impress him before they met again, she hastened on to the street wherein "The Help" was situated, fearing lest he should overtake her, and, obtaining his pardon too readily, too readily forget the evil he might have caused.

It was not her wisest step, possibly ; but she was agitated,

and more than one event had occurred to disturb her. The sick woman's excitement, when she had set forth to break the news to Owen; the horror, and even remorse, of Owen, at his mother's dread of meeting him; and, lastly, the fierce attack of her husband. She reasoned rapidly, and followed the bent of her reason, and went on, dreaming not for one instant of the explanation never being offered to Glindon, and he left to still fight with the fiends that beset him.

And Owen never explained. The departure of Ruth from the room was the signal for a return of Glindon's fierce demeanour. He demanded the reason of his wife being there, in tones that rung throughout the house; he strode close to Owen, and held his clenched hand in his face; he gave way to all that extravagance of action to which passion can lead a man. It was the passion that overpowered him, that is akin to madness, and has been the father of murder.

Owen lost patience. He was sorely troubled, and this man wearied and vexed him.

"You demand!" he said—"if you ask an explanation, you shall have it. Don't demand of me; I am neither your slave nor your victim!"

"You are a villain and a coward!"

"Glindon, do you understand that there is a dying woman, and that——"

"I know that story," he interrupted; "that is a lie and a subterfuge, and I will not listen to it!"

"Will you leave this house?" and Owen put down the clenched hand of his antagonist, and laid his own, large and bony, on Glindon's arm.

"You refuse me an explanation?"

"I refuse everything," said Owen, firmly — "I have had enough of your tempers; if you rouse mine, it will fare badly with you. Will you go?"

"You are a knave!" repeated Glindon.

"Do you think I am knave enough to rob you of your wife? — or that, having such a devilish thought, I should succeed with one so near the angels? Man, you're a fool!"

He thrust him angrily back, and Glindon struck at him. Owen caught the wrist as it descended, and held it in a vice.

"Go home to your wife and hear her story," said he. "See if there is hesitation, or a look throughout, that should warrant this vile conduct; and if you do not ask pardon on your knees before her, you are less a man than I consider you. Your wife has been the dearest friend and comforter to me, and more than me; you have always been an enemy, and quick to misjudge. The story I might tell, you would

only half-believe ; when you are reasonable, I will explain—not now, to a madman !”

“ I will go to her !” said Glindon, suddenly. “ I cannot expect truth from you. But there is a reckoning coming between us, and you cannot escape it.”

Owen opened the door without answering, and, with a menacing gesture, Arthur Glindon passed out. The dark look in his face warned Owen that it might be better to force the truth upon him—that it would possibly be more just to Ruth to attempt the explanation, and he called out “ Glindon !”

Whether Glindon heard or not, he only paused to repeat :

“ There will be a reckoning between us in our next meeting,” and dashed into the street, dreaming not of the hundred chances for ever intervening in life to thwart evil as well as good projects. Now a word, and now the turning of a hair, and now the silent valley of death, into which the most sure-footed may suddenly slip.

Owen went back to think of all this—to lock himself in the room with it, and wonder what had suggested all Glindon’s unaccountable suspicions. It was a trouble to him ; but, like Ruth, he believed Glindon would very soon emerge from the mists of ignorance in which he was groping. When he was calmer, he would be more reasonable—if he only had his (Owen’s) trouble ! And Owen, with his elbows on the table, and his face covered with his hands, forgot Glindon’s madness, and shook with the agony that beset him.

His mother was dying, and begged him not to see her—she preferred the stranger’s care to his own, and could only face him at the last—she accused him even ; for Ruth, having a good motive in view, had informed him of that past hardness and selfishness, which had sent the mother away from him, when the word of God might have stayed her. He was to his mother a stern, unpitying, selfish man, and she would die in her very fear. His face at her bedside, his hand on hers, would but shorten her life. He had risen in the world, and struggled from an evil past to honesty, and yet he had had no mercy on her efforts, naturally more weak than his own, but let her fall away again, and pardoned not. Seventy and seven times was the man in the parable exhorted to forgive ; and he had given her one chance and cast her off. God forgive his pride and wickedness !

He might have thought thus an hour, when a messenger arrived with a note.

“ It’s from Mrs. Glindon, Sir,” said the servant, and Owen opened it with eager hands.

A few lines hastily written in pencil met his eyes.

"Dear Owen,—Come at once.

"Ruth."

He let the paper fall from his hands, and stood for a moment horror-stricken — then he dashed from the room, seized his hat, and ran off. The vicinity of "The Help" was not a long distance from Dell's house, and he ran rapidly down the Kennington Road, across to Oakley Street, and then to the mass of streets and courts to the right thereof.

People stared at him and jumped out of his way, doubtful if he were from Bethlehem Hospital, or had stolen anything, or was merely keeping himself warm that wintry day ; but before their doubts had arrived at a definite solution, Owen was out of sight.

He reached the house—it had seemed an age to him, notwithstanding his quick progress—the blinds were down in the windows, but then the sun shone on that side of the way, and poor people were always fidgety about their colours flying. It was not too late—it couldn't be too late to see her !

The woman opened the door and courtesied to him. He nodded his head by way of recognition, but asked no questions—he had not the courage to address a word to her.

"Up stairs, Sir—Mrs. Glindon's there still."

*Still!* What a strange word it sounded ! The door was closed, and he turned the handle and pushed it open without announcing his presence.

Ruth was kneeling at the bedside, and in the bed lay the dead mother !

"Not dead, Ruth—not dead without a word !" he cried.

Ruth rose, and held her hands towards him.

"My poor Owen, it was to be. It was God's will."

"It is awful !"

He dropped into a chair, and sat there looking at her who was at peace. Very mournfully was his gaze directed to the silent figure.

"At the last, Ruth—what did she say—what were her last words ?"

"God make the son's life better than the mother's !"

"Not the old accusation—not again the awful words you told me this morning ?"

"No."

"Will you say them again ?"

"What is the good, Owen ?"

"I wish it," said he ; "go on : 'He might have saved me——'"

"He might have saved me, had he thought more of God and less of himself, eight years ago!'—but, oh! Owen, I believe she *was* saved."

"By the efforts of a stranger, who had more faith in God than myself—yes."

"Still saved," said Ruth, earnestly; "and with faith in the promises made by Him who died for us, Owen, she passed away, praying for your better life—FOR YOURS!"

The change was working in him. He saw all that he had missed of truth, and all that he had closed his heart to. He heard of her repentance, and that last prayer, with a heaving chest. He stood by the side of the mother, and thought how she might have died but for Ruth. God's hand was in it all.

"I have been as hard as the nether mill-stone—I have sinned! Will you go away, and leave me with the dead."

Ruth closed the door upon his sorrow, and left him gazing at the dead face—a face so much younger, brighter, and more peaceful than he had ever known it living. He stooped over the bed, kissed her forehead, drew the white sheet over her, and then the strong man sank upon his knees, a very child!







## CHAPTER IV.

### THE RESULT.

**A**RTHUR GLINDON did not hurry back to George Street to pour forth his vials of wrath—he walked back at what he considered a temperate pace, and offered himself every opportunity of becoming cool and collected. He would do nothing rashly; it should not be said *this time* that in the spur of the moment he gave vent to words which, in the cooler after-period, he bitterly repented. He flattered himself that he was in the right for once; and so he would be just, but inflexible. From that day forth no more of Ruth playing the Samaritan, and no more of her friend's dangerous expressions of his gratitude.

To do Doctor Glindon justice, it is fair to say that he did not now suspect any prearrangement in the meeting between his wife and Owen; he would grant it, now he was getting cooler, to have been an accident, taken advantage of by that designing hound who had ordered him out of the house. A curse upon him; he should rue it yet! He should not play the hero to his wife, and seek step by step to rob him of her affection. The paltry game was seen through, and should end!

Glindon let himself into his house in George Street with the latch-key; it would be better to get his little expression of will over as quietly as possible; and servants were ever suspicious and quick at detecting the signs of a storm. Not that he intended to storm very loudly—he was as calm as a judge, and his pulse was not much above fever-heat.

Into the drawing-room, where he had expected to find Mrs. Glindon, and where its vacuity made him feel uncomfortable —not that he doubted his wife's disobedience to his last com-

mands to return home. Possibly she was up stairs playing the injured heroine, with her hair down her back and the tears streaming forth. Well, the picture would not stop him delivering a piece of his mind.

Glindon went up stairs with this idea, found the rooms empty, came down again, looked in the breakfast parlour and study, returned to the drawing-room, and noticed for the first time two letters awaiting him. Hastily breaking the seals, he found one from the North, communicating the good news that his son's health was rapidly improving, and that the son wished to see his mother; and the other from Mrs. Cherbury, reminding him that he and Mrs. Glindon had promised to dine at Oaklands that day.

"A quiet dinner at five," she added; "but Ruth has promised to come early and make a long day of it. If you should be pressed for time, do not return home to dress—we were never fussy people, you know."

Glindon crumpled the letters on the table, went through a little quick exercise over the carpet, made a sudden dash at the bell-rope, and hung to it, *à la Leotard*, till some one responded to his summons.

"Where's your mistress?"

"I don't know, Sir."

"Don't know? Why, she came in a little while ago, I suppose?"

"No, she did not, Sir."

"Not been in yet!"

"No, Sir."

"Then go down stairs and don't stand staring at me!"

More quick steps, then he gave a full-length plunge to the sofa, and ground his white teeth together. It was plain she cared nothing for his will or for his feelings; she had not returned, although there had been plenty of time allowed her; she had chosen to go her own way and defy him. At her own convenience would she meet the brunt of his anger, not at his own. She would return to "The Help," or do some damnable shopping even, before she considered it her duty to obey his behests. Very well—or rather, very bad—now, what was the next step of Arthur Glindon, M.D.?

The next step was to wait half an hour, going through a series of evolutions on and off the sofa, to beguile the time—his last step to proceed to his room and dress for his visit to Oaklands. It suddenly struck him that Ruth had proceeded direct to Ansted, taking it for granted that he would remember the invitation and follow—and follow he intended now with a vengeance.

He was on his way, shortly afterwards, to the railway station, but his suspicious mind would not allow him much rest. He was not satisfied that Ruth had proceeded to Oaklands. It was hardly likely, considering their quarrel, and yet one woman readily seeks the consolation of another, and Mrs. Cherbury was so old a friend. But he would go to "The Help" first, just for an instant, and make an enquiry; and the cabman received orders to turn in the direction of Oakley Street and enquire for "Owen's Help."

When he was before "The Help," which at that hour of the day was closed, he sprang from the cab, and made a spiteful effort to wrench the knocker off, rousing half the street meanwhile with his application for admission.

"Is Mrs. Glindon here?" he asked of a little girl who, open-mouthed, had answered his summons.

"No, Sir."

"Nor Mr. Owen?"

"No, Sir."

"Has either been here to-day?"

"No, Sir."

"Can't you say anything but 'No, Sir'?"

"No, Sir."

Glindon cursed the damsel with hearty vehemence, and strode back to his cab, the maid following him as far as the kerb-stone.

"Have you anything more to say to me?" he asked.

"Please, Mrs. Simmons is out who minds 'The Help,' and the place is empty. Mrs. Simmons can tell you, Sir. I'm only one of the 'sistants on trial."

"But Mrs. Glindon—you know her?—has *not* she been here to-day?"

"No, Sir."

"And there's no one dying here?"

"No, Sir."

"Drive to Kennington Road again!" cried Glindon. "This is a devilish black mystery, that must be solved!"

It was scarcely passion now that mastered him, and made his hands tremble, and rendered his face so ghastly livid. There was a lower depth of rage, more silent and intense, and he had descended to it suddenly. He was a man groping in the mist now, and his heart was very heavy. One inch before him in the future he could not see, whither to go, or in whom to trust? He had been suspicious, cruelly suspicious, before that hour; but in his heart he felt there was no wrong done, and that all had been accidental and spontaneous. Now it had assumed sombre proportions, and was of a

seriousness to affect a life. And yet it was his wife whom he suspected ; a religious woman, whose chief anxiety had been his own spiritual welfare—a quiet, grave, even methodical woman, who despised romance and passion. What did it all mean?—what *could* it mean ! Up the garden front of John Dell's house, where he had not expected to find himself again, and with a heart so much more heavy. The servant had seen him from the lower window, and had the door open as he went up the steps. Like a man in a dream he passed her, and walked into the room where his angry colloquy with Owen had ensued. The maid followed him.

"If you please, Sir, Mr. Owen has been out some time."

"Indeed !"

"Ever since the message was brought him from 'The Help.'"

"The Help" again ! Were all Owen's servants in this jugglery, or dupes thereto ? He caught sight of a paper on the floor, and picked it up. Any clue to so dark a mystery would be grateful to him, and this might be the message—"Good God !"

*"Dear Owen,—Come at once.*

*"Ruth."*

He sat down after that blow, and steadied his head by resting it on his hand ; it was the last feather, and he had sunk with it. Was there any occasion to suspect any longer ?—were not his worst suspicions confirmed, and had not the darkness utterly closed in ? The servant's voice recalled him to himself a little.

"Will you wait for Mr. Dell, or Mr. Owen ?"

"I am going now."

He could not wait for Dell—that hard, dry being, whose soul was in his niece. Dell would not believe in any wrong ; the whole story, told link by link, would not affect him. He would give Ruth one last chance before he fired the train to startle all the little world in which she had gained such love—he would go to Oaklands.

For one instant he did not think to find Ruth there ; in the face of the stern facts, and the still sterner lies which he fancied he had already detected,—with that last crushing note in his hands, written by Ruth as if in desperation,—he had no right to believe for a moment that he should find her. But he would go to Oaklands in search of her—making first one call at her father's in the Westminster Road, by way of a forlorn hope.

Not at her father's—she had not been there for a week 92 informed him—did Mr. Glindon wish to see her particularly?—had anything happened?

“Happened?—no.”

“I thought the child might be worse, perhaps,” said 92.

“He's better.”

“That's good news; for Ruth seemed anxious-like last week, when Mr. Owen was——”

Glindon could not hear the name again coupled with his wife's. He left the old man to complete the sentence to Tarby, or to the tobacco jars, and dashed into his cab. He was at the railway terminus, engaged in a little dispute with a gentleman whom he had thrust aside in his eagerness to obtain a ticket, then on the platform looking for the train that was to bear him to Ansted—and finally in a first-class compartment, with a surly old gentleman, reading the *Times* newspaper.

Glindon crossed his arms, and gave himself up to the battle of thoughts within him. They were all against Ruth now—step by step, as though it had been ordered so, had he been led on to the discovery. From that day forth no faith in woman or the world—no trust in any one save himself—no belief in honour, justice, woman's virtue, heaven! It was all a blank, and men and women were but creatures of the hour—now tyrants, and now victims. He was scarcely conscious that the train had started, when the guard was bawling “Ansted” in his ears. If it were a dream after all, what a mercy would be his awakening!

The miserable man stumbled out of the carriage at the Ansted Station, and went through the town and along the country road in the old mechanical fashion. How the times had changed since he was there last!—what a different train of thoughts had kept his brain busy! He spent his wedding-day in Ansted, and friends wished him every happiness in life, and prophesied it, believing in the truthfulness of her he had chosen for a helpmate. Well, he had believed it himself—and now he distrusted all the world.

Before the place, and passing Mrs. Cutchfield's lodge, and walking very slowly up the broad carriage drive. The trees were bare now, and the frost hung its silver work upon the branches, and the robin—homeless and alone like himself—hopped before him up the path. It was a fitting time to return there, with the frost at the heart which had glowed so warmly in the summer of his life.

Surely a dream still, for he was in the drawing-room at Oaklands, without a consciousness of having passed the hall,

or having been ushered in by servants. Yet Mrs. Cherbury and her son Isaac were before him, and a dark-haired young lady, whom he had never seen, left the music-stool on which she had been sitting, when he entered.

"Where's Mrs. Glindon—where's Ruth?"

He looked from one to the other wildly, then he sank into a chair, and commenced striking the table like a madman.

"Glindon—what's the matter?" asked Cherbury.

"Oh! my gracious!—what has happened?" echoed his mother.

"The worst has happened, Mrs. Cherbury," said Glindon, turning his white face towards her; "I have been deceived in my wife, who has lied to me—I have discovered an intrigue—I call it nothing more nor less now!—between that woman who bears my name and Owen."

"Owen!" echoed three voices, one very shrill and piercing.

"He loved her when he was a youth—he owned that long ago—he was my rival; now he would have been my false friend! I found him at her side to-day—I found this letter at a later hour—may Heaven's lightning blast him!"

"Hush, hush, Sir!—it's a mistake," cried Mrs. Cherbury "you are not reasonable—you do not know what you are saying or doing."

"It's all true!" and Glindon, after a vague look at her, dropped his head between his hands, and remained silent. Meanwhile Mary had picked up the note which he had cast on the carpet, and read the few words it contained. She was deathly white, and held one hand to her side.

"Mary, dear—don't *you* be alarmed," said Mrs. Cherbury, "Doctor Glindon is excited, and does not know what he is saying. Sit down, my dear, sit down. It's a dreadful fuss, but we shall soon get over it."

"Yes, yes—don't alarm yourself, Miss Chickney," added Isaac Cherbury.

But Mary was already alarmed, and had much to trouble her. For suddenly in the midst of her happiness had fallen the bolt to shatter the idol. She would not believe in its destruction yet, however; Doctor Glindon's excitement was great, and could not be without a cause, but that Owen had acted in any way unworthily she could not believe for a moment. He might have loved Ruth in times past—she had fancied he had once—he might love her even now, and his love for his little ward be a pitying, compassionate affection, at which her heart revolted, but he had not acted falsely to the wild man sitting there.

"Doctor Glindon, you will stay with us some time," said Mrs. Cherbury.

"I have nowhere else to go, Madam," he answered in a more rational manner.

"Mary, come for a walk with me, child—it will do you good."

Glindon was on his feet.

"You are going to George Street—I will not have it."

"Upon my word, I am thinking of nothing of the sort."

Glindon dropped into his seat once more, and looked at Cherbury facing him.

"You must think me mad, Cherbury."

"Well—n—no," replied that gentleman.

"I have borne enough to drive me mad, although I have no right to come here with my wrongs and rave about them. Perhaps I am a little mad—wise people would have kept all this to themselves."

Mr. Isaac Cherbury thought it probable. He looked rather nervously at the door, as it closed behind Mrs. Cherbury and Mary, and edged his chair nearer to the bell-handle, in case of further eccentricities on the part of his friend.

"You need not be alarmed," said Glindon, noticing the movement, "the volcano subsides into itself; a fitting place, where it can consume within and trouble no one. I have but thrown into the air a few hot ashes, signs of the heat and force that such a wrong as mine must naturally create."

"Glindon, do you know that I think you are mistaken."

"Think what you please."

"I have known Mrs. Glindon as long as yourself—I have lately had many opportunities of judging Mr. Owen's character."

"One may live with a man or woman all his life; he may be his closest friend, she may be even *his wife*, and yet he will ever remain ignorant of the real nature of either."

"Circumstances have misled you, Glindon," said Cherbury; "you will think differently soon. Will you take anything?"

"Brandy."

Cherbury rang the bell, and then began to pat his own head carefully. All his old symptoms were coming back, he fancied—his head ached fit to split!

The brandy and water ordered and brought, Cherbury stood by the table, manœuvring with the glasses.

"Shall I mix for you?" he asked, intending the weakest possible dose for his friend.

Glindon answered by snatching the brandy-bottle from the liqueur-frame, and half filling the tumbler nearest him.

"I wouldn't—I wouldn't drink it neat, in your state."

"You needn't fear."

And the brandy disappeared down the throat of Arthur Glindon.

"That would nearly kill me," observed Cherbury.

"Ah! you've grown abstemious, and temperate," sneered his friend; "once upon a time, in the merry, merry days when you were young, it was different, I have heard."

Cherbury looked as if he objected to the remark, but he made no answer; and Glindon pushing the tray away, leaned his head on his arms, which were folded on the table.

A long silence ensued; Mr. Cherbury thought he had fallen asleep, and moved cautiously about on tiptoe in search of the music-book from which Mary Chickney had been playing. If Mr. Glindon could have a nap it would refresh him, and he might wake up a little less excited, which would be pleasant for all parties. Assuring himself thus, and after discovering the music-book, he took up his place by the bell-handle again. He fancied Glindon was more drunk than mad now; still he might as well sit near the bell! Glindon had always been a bad-tempered fellow, he knew, but inclined to be sorry when the fit was past; it would be all right presently, and he should hear the whole story, and be able to express an opinion thereon after arriving at the rights of the case. What a pretty song that was of Mary Chickney's, and how nicely she had sung it, and how very easy and comfortable he felt before that young man came bouncing into the drawing-room like a stage-ranter. He, Isaac Cherbury, of Oaklands, was a man of the world—a sceptical man in his way—but he could not believe that Glindon was correct in his surmises. He had a great esteem for Owen now—for his energy of character, his frankness, his efforts to do good to the class from which he had arisen—and he could not for an instant believe him guilty of a thought against the honour of his friend. There was a misconception of facts, that might be easily explained; and consoling himself with that thought, he would think of Mary Chickney's last song.

Glindon and he were occupying the same positions when Mrs. Cherbury re-entered the room.

"Hush—don't make a noise—he's asleep!"

"I'm not asleep." And Glindon leaned back in his chair.

"I should have awakened you if you had been," said Mrs. Cherbury. "Here, young man, is a telegraphic message I have received from your wife."

"What's that!"



"And it's my opinion there was no occasion to be half so fussy."

"Will you explain, please?"

"I thought it possible that Ruth was at home, and so telegraphed to her, informing her that you were here, and asking her to join you. This is her answer."

"Is she at home then?"

"Yes."

Glindon pushed his hair back from his forehead and looked bewildered. The consciousness of having made a fool of himself was beginning to suggest itself unpleasantly. He took the paper from Mrs. Cherbury's hands and read :

*"Pray excuse me to-day. I have been sitting up all night with Mr. Owen's mother, who died this morning. I hope Arthur will not be late."*

Doctor Glindon turned the message over a few times, read the address of sender and receiver, inspected the printed directions, scratched his head savagely. There was a great load taken off his mind. If there were still a mystery, he could see it would take very little to explain it—noonday was shining in again, and he had been an ass, and what was worse, had summoned others to witness that fact. His heart was lighter, but his temper was still affected. He was a proud man, and it mortified him to reflect on the extravagance that he had committed. He had shown to the world that the wife whom he should have been the last to distrust had been suspected. He had heaped accusations against her, and called down vengeance on Owen—and all for nothing.

Human nature is strangely inconsistent. With the load of misery removed from him, he could almost fancy it would have been better to have been less clearly proved in the wrong than have sat there so pitiable an object.

"There is a mistake, no doubt," said he, rising, "and I have to apologise for all the folly I have been guilty of. I'm not myself to-day—let me excuse an abrupt departure."

"Not going?"

"I should be poor company here," he continued, "my head aches. I shall be better in the air."

Mrs. Cherbury did not press him very warmly to remain. She thought it best for him and his wife, that matters should be satisfactorily cleared before the sun went down on his wrath.

"I'm afraid I have missed the next train to London," said he, looking at his watch. "I shall never walk it in the time."

Mrs. Cherbury offered the carriage, which he accepted. He was in great haste to be gone now—he would not miss

that train for fifty pounds—he remembered an appointment with the Colonial Secretary at four that afternoon—he thought the servants might have made the carriage in less time, than they took to harness a pair of horses to it.

"How long a time is there left to catch the train?" he enquired of the coachman.

"Seven minutes and a half."

"A sovereign if you do it!"

The carriage whirled him away from Oaklands and along the country road in good style. Seven minutes and a half would soon be at an end though, and he might lose the train after all. He hung out of the carriage window, and begged the man to drive faster, and swore at him in his impatience, which seemed to render all progress very slow. At the station, and the shrill whistle sounding in his ears!

"I'm afraid we've lost it, Sir," said the coachman, taking off his hat, and shampooing his forehead with his pocket-handkerchief.

Glindon flung a sovereign into the hat, and rushed through the station. The train was slowly gliding on, and the guard stopped him as his hand was on the carriage door.

"Train moving, Sir—against the rules."

But money breaks through most rules, and Glindon's fee softened the man's heart and opened the carriage door.

"Jump in, Sir."

In the carriage—the door banged to and fastened—the guard swinging himself into his back cupboard—the train puffing and clattering on its way to London.

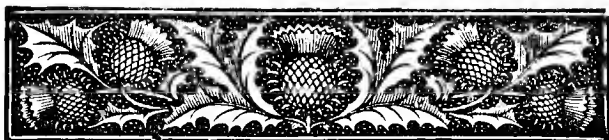
To the London it never reached in safety. The old blunder of luggage-vans upon the line, and signal-men giving no note of danger, and station masters ignorant of orders, and a board of direction that directed nothing properly, and set no value on human life, save as it affected dividends—and nobody in the wrong, or nobody to whom sufficient blame could be attached to hang him properly out of the way.

The old story, that leaps from the newspaper half-a-dozen times a-year, and is always a record of gross mismanagement. The story which a sleepy House of Commons will *not* set straight—there are too many railway directors whose feelings might be hurt amongst the great M.P.'s.

There were two lives sacrificed in this instance—one that of Arthur Glindon's. Well for him, well for Ruth, that he had not died full of distrust to the last!

## BOOK VII.

HOW THE STORM ENDED.



## CHAPTER I.

### TROUBLED WATERS.

**T**HERE are extremes in religion as well as in everything else. A man suddenly converted—shocked, as it were, to thinking less of the world and himself generally—takes often to that extreme and becomes an ascetic. Time may bring him back to a higher view of things unsecular; but in a sudden awakening from error his desire to recoil from the brink makes him proceed, not too far the other way, but too far along the tortuous, briary, uncomfortable path, when a fairer track would have sufficed as well.

Owen had awakened to the one mistake of his life—he saw it then in all its narrowness and deformity. It had been pride in his own works, in the name he had made, and no charity to others lower in the scale; the Pharisee to pass by, never the Samaritan to heal—the stern teacher, seldom the scholar—the upright and high-principled man, but never the meek and all-forgiving Christian.

“God make the son’s life better than the mother’s!” had been the mother’s prayer, and the last words of the woman were an atonement for her whole life’s utterance. They did good—they humbled the strong man in his pride and self-reliance, and they taught him to be grateful. True, he showed his gratitude in a strange manner, but he was one of a class, and there was no great singularity in him. The reaction was great, for his mother’s death had greatly affected him.

There was some of the old monkish doctrine of expiation in Owen. By making himself as uncomfortable as he could, he thought that he was atoning for his past errors and stubbornness—by thinking less of his business, shunning for a time Mary, to whom he was engaged, and in whose society he was

happy, by lavishing more money than he could well afford on "The Help," he fancied that he was evincing a more contrite spirit.

And he was truly contrite, and might have shown it after a different fashion, but the shadow of death was heavy on his heart, and there was mourning in his home and in John Dell's. For Owen was no longer living with Dell, but renting apartments in the same neighbourhood. He preferred life alone for the present; he wished to study and review his position, and he was better by himself—much better! Besides, Ruth, a young widow, who smiled as little as himself now, was with her boy, living at John Dell's house, and the world had had something to say concerning him and Ruth.

Servants' eyes, on the day of his quarrel with Glindon, had been sharp; and servants' tongues rust not idly as a rule, and are not backward in magnifying incidents out of the common way—or in the common way either—hence the world had caught at the threads and filaments floating about the atmosphere of Kennington, and pieced together more of a romantic story than a scandalous, which was at least rather kind of the world, considering what an old back-biter it is. A story of an erotic shade, perhaps—like a sentimental French romance, where the good wives of prosy men fall in love with misanthropical youths, and much passion struggles with much propriety, and all ends becomingly—with a double suicide perhaps—in the last chapter. Owen had been an early lover of Mrs. Glindon, and the common charity at "The Help" had brought them together again, and Mrs. Glindon and Owen had talked of old times, till they had cried over them; and Doctor Glindon, who was supposed by the world to have been ninety, had caught them crying, and there had been an exciting scene, and a duel arranged, and happily, indefinitely postponed, by a matter of fact railway accident—a common thing, that happens every day! That was the story, to which a concluding chapter was added, a little precipitately. Owen was to marry the widow, and live happy ever afterwards.

So Owen thought it a good plan to absent himself from the house of his friend; and John Dell endorsed that opinion, though he was angry with the world, and went about with eyes distended and his hands clenched, as though anxious to punch its head, for getting such nonsense crammed into it.

"I suppose I'm never to be comfortably settled!" he grumbled—for John Dell could grumble at times; "first Owen with me, then away—then with me, and away again—then a heap of talk about his marrying poor Ruth!"

We have said that Owen preferred punishing himself by keeping away from Mary Chickney ; he wrote her one or two letters, apprising her of his mother's death, and the shock that the discovery had been to him. He stated how utterly disheartened he felt under the circumstances ; and prayed her for a time to leave him in that gloom and misery he justly merited.

Mary received these letters, read them in the solitude of her chamber, but made no comment upon them to her friends at Oaklands. She had become strangely dull and taciturn herself, as though the shadow of Owen's loss had fallen heavily upon her. Mrs. Cherbury was perplexed with Mary's demeanour, did not admire her sorrowful looks, or the deep reveries into which she occasionally plunged.

"You mustn't give way, my dear, because a trouble has befallen Mr. Owen ; the troubles must come in their time, and we ought to bear them resignedly. And you, my dear Mary, are not bearing them in the right way."

"I shall be better in a week or two," murmured Mary.

"We shall have Mr. Owen paying his regular visits soon, and all the roses back in your cheeks before Christmas."

Mary smiled, but replied not.

"And perhaps Mr. Owen *is* a little too particular about form," added Mrs. Cherbury ; "and makes rather a fussy mourning of it. If I had been in his place, I should have thought a little distraction good for me, and not have stayed at home, brooding and moping. But he will come round, my dear, after the fashion of men who are inclined to be extravagant. It's like the young widowers, my dear—and the old ones, too, for that matter—tearing their hair, and crying and knocking their silly heads about for the first month, and at the end of the third engaged to be married again, and looking fat and rosy ! Oh ! these men, my dear, they're an out-of-the-way lot !"

"I am very anxious to see Owen," said Mary.

"Then I should write to him to that effect, and give him a piece of my mind, too, if it were only to rouse him. He will come trooping down fast enough then."

"Poor Owen !"

"Mary, I shall write to him myself if you don't—you're giving me the creeps, my dear."

Mary, alarmed at Mrs. Cherbury's assertion, promised to write to her guardian, but the fulfilment of the promise was delayed for several days. What she wished to write appeared a trouble to her, and there was ever a struggle with her composure as she sat before the desk thinking of all she should

say to him. For Mary had a great deal on her mind to say, and her heart felt heavy over the task. The seeds of Glindon's revelation had taken root and borne fruit—much of her day-dreams had vanished—the after-life lay beyond an impenetrable mystery. She was sobered at once from girlhood, and the cares of womanhood were pressing heavily upon her. In her bright life she had fancied that such happiness as hers must be transitory ; she had been almost prepared for some change, and now that it had come she thought the burden difficult to sustain.

Mary Chickney found herself at this time paying more frequent visits than ordinary to Mrs. Cutchfield's lodge. She was troubled, and it was pleasant to seek the old friend in whose care she had been formerly placed. "I can fancy the old days back with me, the humble sphere again existent," she said, as though the grand life had not brought all the happiness anticipated. There was another reason for her visits, which neither Mrs. Cherbury nor Mrs. Cutchfield guessed at in the first instance, a belief that Mrs. Cutchfield was less of an observer than the lady of Oaklands. In the society of Mrs. Cutchfield, Mary could fear less the discovery of the secret that she was unhappy, or that Owen's absence was not the original cause of her sorrow. She could revive the past with Mrs. Cutchfield, talk of her school days, and the life she had led the old lady in her vivacious moments ; and Mrs. Cutchfield, always primed for a subject so engrossing, took the lead, and related her twentieth-told anecdotes anew, crying and laughing over them as things of yesterday.

Mary Chickney had reckoned without her host, notwithstanding. The old nurse and mother was a woman who liked a reason for everything, and Mary's grief was not very deeply veiled. She was a girl to whose ingenuous nature concealment was difficult, and every day the thoughts accumulated and distressed her. Mrs. Cutchfield put on her spectacles to enquire into the matter more closely, and on the next occasion of Mary's visit related her stories with the same zest, but watched very narrowly their effect on her listener.

It was very plain, then, that Mary sought her company for something more than her stories, Mrs. Cutchfield thought ; for when the old lady appeared to be fairly started with her long train of reminiscences, the fancy work dropped into Mary's lap, and the fingers plied no longer the needle.

Still Mrs. Cutchfield rambled on—artfully dropping here and there a few incoherent phrases, to watch the result — till a white hand was suddenly passed across the eyes.

"Mary Chickney, something's the matter?" said the old woman, suddenly.

"No, no," cried Mary, hastily; "nothing more than usual."

"Ah! but what's *the usual* about?" said Mrs. Cutchfield; "is it a secret from the old mammy, as well as the rest of the world?"

"Yes—I think so," said Mary, with a sigh.

"It's the love troubles that are bothering you, my dear—they always catch us up young, and the twitches are horrid. And yet you—*you* oughtn't to be fidgeting now."

Mary tried to laugh away the old woman's suspicions, but it was a feeble attempt, and necessarily failed.

"You haven't been quarrelling with Mr. Owen?—that's not likely."

"No."

"You're not sorry you were ever engaged to him?—Mary, my dear girl, it can't be that!"

"Yes—yes—it is!"

And Mary—a child in many things still—threw herself into Mrs. Cutchfield's arms, and sobbed there several minutes, the old woman patting her back with alternate hands, in a drum-solo kind of fashion.

"I always thought it was too young for an engagement; you're hardly eighteen now, and gals of eighteen can't know their own minds—much less seventeen, such as you were, my girl," said Mrs. Cutchfield, when Mary was composed a little; "but it's all happened for the best—it always does, my dear—how it works itself round now! The best for you and him, and your duty to tell him that he was too old for you—that—that you love some one better, perhaps."

"No, no!—not that!" cried Mary, turning deathly white. "I never implied that—it is false—every bit false! I love him more than my life, as I have always loved him—but—but I can never make him happy!"

"How's that?"

"Because his love's so different to mine—because he loved me out of charity, and knew too well my heart was his before he asked for it."

"I don't believe a word of it, my girl!"

"Because"—in an excited whisper—"he loved another years ago—one more fitting for him in every way than I; and she is free to become his wife now, and make his whole life different."

"John Dell's niece?"

"Yes."

"Where have you learnt all this?—who told you?"



"I have gathered part from friends, part from inspiration, and I know every word to be true!"

Mrs. Cutchfield and Mary sat down side by side. Mary was calm and patient now. She had unbosomed her story to her oldest friend—one who could reason with her as with a loved daughter.

"Knowing this to be true, and yet that Owen would keep his word and marry me—knowing how happy I should be all my life, and yet what a barrier between him and his brightest thoughts!—knowing that now by a word which sinks me down so deeply, I can raise him and his hopes—what would you do?"

"Give him up!"

"I am glad you think so! It will strengthen me in the purpose I have formed."

"It won't be so very hard a task for us, Mary," said Mrs. Cutchfield, adopting the plural, as more comforting—"we'll soon be used to the change, and all the better for it. There is too much thinking of our earthly comforts, and too little of the t'other; it's well we have a balk to the first, I'm inclined to consider. It will all belong to the old days soon, like the school-days, child, and the blackberry-gatherings—and we may afford to laugh at this. And there's as good fish in the sea, my child; and if we haven't all his heart, why, we're a sight too good for him—and so let him go a-courting somewhere else!"

Mary Chickney returned to the great house, prepared to delay no longer the day of separation. What was there to wait for?—and was not every day making it a more difficult task? Why not put herself and him out of misery at once? There was no lengthy explanation required; she felt that he would understand, and in his heart thank her for dissolving the engagement.

She could see no reason for delay. Every day might be of moment to her guardian, and there was no occasion to wait till he returned sorrowfully and regretfully to Oaklands, to play the part that had for so long a time deceived her. He loved Ruth Glindon as he had loved Ruth Dell; separated from her by her marriage he had chosen his ward—out of charity, repeated Mary, with a swelling chest; and now death had made Ruth a widow, and two old lovers might be united.

Mary Chickney made no doubt that they had been lovers once—everybody must love her Owen—and Ruth was so much more fitting to be Owen's wife. Ruth was older, and had had more worldly experience; she could comfort him in his trials better than herself; she was a pious, gentle, but

firm woman, whose words would encourage him onwards, and whose love would make Owen's life bright.

And only she—his little ward—stood in the way. And he had been a faithful guardian—thinking and planning for her, educating her and working for her, till the days when Mrs. Cherbury took her as a *protégée*. He had done so much for her, and she for him so little! She would hesitate no longer!





## CHAPTER 11.

### OWEN AND MARY.

**T**WO months had passed since the mother's death at the branch establishment of "Owen's Help." Life was proceeding quietly with our friends at Lambeth, if a little monotonously. There had burst a heavy storm over their heads, but the shock had been sustained, and calm weather appeared to have set in. Given time and faith to work their usual changes, and the sun would shine, and the doctrine of resignation be learned.

Owen was trying hard to learn his part, but there were many difficulties in the way. He had much, as we have already implied, wherewith to reproach himself. Meeting the sad face of Ruth occasionally—noting the dark weeds and the sign of her widowhood—he felt that he had been an agent to her grief.

More kindly feeling one to another, a little explanation on the day he and Glindon had exchanged fierce words together, might have moderated Glindon's passions, and led him to seek his wife instead of proceeding to Oaklands. But his pride had been humbled that day, and death had been busy therein, and all had been against him. No, Heaven forgive him, not all against him!—for he had seen at last his mistake, and it would lead him to a better life.

Owen sat in his room one winter's afternoon, thinking of these things—wondering if it were right to seek the world yet, and his happiness in it : for his heart strangely yearned to his betrothed ! All his future happiness lay in Mary, but was it just to the memory of the past to dash greedily at it ? Had he thought enough of that past, or atoned sufficiently ?

He was inclined to make one step into a brighter atmosphere ; to cease letter-writing — strange, gloomy, unloverlike

letter-writing it had been—and proceed to Oaklands in search of consolation. The new year had begun, and at any time he might claim her for his wife. Surely his sorrow had been a little selfish, and he had pained Mary by his penitential absence! He had not considered how his absence might affect her, but had wrapped himself in his griefs and regrets, and thought—even then—only of *himself*!

Owen drew the desk towards him, and proceeded to indite a few lines to Mary; and whilst his pen travelled over the paper, she was advancing towards him.

A knock at the door, and then the landlady's entrance arrested his hand.

"If you please, Sir, a lady wishes to speak with you."

"A lady—what sort of lady?"

"Miss Chickney."

Owen was surprised, but he was not a man to betray himself to his landlady.

"Will you show her in, please?" said he, turning to his desk.

As the landlady departed, Owen endeavoured to define a reason for Mary's sudden appearance at his apartments. He connected trouble with it in some indefinite shape and form; he had become accustomed to trouble, and expected a long train of punishments for past omissions. He thought more of God's justice—even vengeance—than His mercy!

Mary entered, and stood hesitating at the door. She was in deep mourning for his mother—for his griefs were hers—and her black dress touched his heart.

"Mary, you have not come alone?" he said, rising, and taking, for a moment, both her hands in his.

"No, Owen. Mrs. Cutchfield is down stairs."

"Will she not come up? Has anything happened at Oaklands?"

"No, she will wait for me. Nothing has happened; but I have some—something very particular to say—that which ought to have been said long since, Owen; but which you must pardon me for deferring. I have not liked to intrude upon your distress before."

"Sit down, Mary, and take your time over the revelation. You are agitated."

"No—not particularly."

She took the chair that Owen had placed for her, and Owen went back to his desk, and feigned to continue his letter, that she might gather firmness to proceed. He was quick at conclusions, for he had already surmised the object of her coming—he had expected some such blow to end all

hopes at once. Mary sat and watched his thoughtful face—thought how cool he was over her sudden appearance in his room, and how little it affected him. He was changed too, his face appeared to have become more aged and stern, and she could fancy there were a few gray threads in his dark hair. But he was a grim statue, whom nothing could affect. He might be grateful to her in his heart, but he would never own it. He sat there a mystery to her, and she thought it was for the best that she parted from one whose inner nature she might have never comprehended, and whose deep thoughts would have been always beyond her. “How the best works itself round!” had Mrs. Cutchfield said only yesterday.

Still it was a struggle to imitate that enviable calmness of her guardian. If she could only keep firm, and tell him all without a wavering voice. She made the effort after a while, and gathered courage slowly to confront—the best.

“I have been thinking lately, guardian, how—how very unsuited we are to each other, and what a strange engagement it has been. I—I have been thinking that your life would be better without me—and that your chance of happiness would be much more sure.”

“And yours, Mary?” he enquired. “Your happiness, of course, would be enhanced by this step.”

Mary hesitated. She was a truthful girl, but she was thinking of Owen’s happiness alone. She was willing to sacrifice everything for that, and to speak of her own despair was to urge a claim upon him not to take her at her word. She knew his was a generous heart that would sacrifice much in its turn, and she wished to prove to him how expedient the annulment of their engagement was.

“And mine, of course,” she said, in answer to Owen’s slow and careful sentence.

Owen turned to the desk and scrawled a few hasty, meaningless lines on the paper before him. He had thought all his old pride gone till then; but it was a deep stab, and touched to the quick.

“You gave me one year to consider, Owen. You would not accept me unconditionally till then,” she continued, “and I have thought it just, and fair, and honourable, to say that we had better end our foolish engagement.”

“Very well.”

“We should have never been happy, Owen.”

“It is possible,” he answered.

He did not look towards her, though she was praying for one glance. His voice grew more hard, and had a metallic ring in it, that seemed to make the room vibrate. If he would

but express sorrow, some little regret—say some kind words that she might remember when that day was a cruel retrospect !

And what could he have said in the first bitter moments of his disappointment ? She had told him, almost calmly, that they would have never been happy, and he did not know she meant only himself. He fancied that the woman's thoughts were at variance with the child's, and she had awakened to the true knowledge of her affections. A sister's love was different from a wife's, and she had only loved him like a sister, as was natural, considering her youth.

"The new year has brought you wiser thoughts, Mary," he said, after a pause ; "you accepted me hastily—you have a right to decline my love in the same manner. I left you free to act, and you have acted rightly."

"I am sorry—I am very sorry—at such a time as this to speak of our separation, Owen, but time was drawing on, and you were not free."

"True."

A longer silence than before. Owen sitting at the desk, his head supported by his hand, his earnest gaze directed beyond her at the window, where the wintry sky—dull and leaden like his heart—looked in upon them.

Mary glanced wistfully towards him — why wouldn't he speak to her ?—look at her again ? Did he think the interview at an end, and wish her to go away like that ?

"Are you angry with me, guardian ?" she asked at last.

Owen started.

"God forbid, my child !"

The words were uttered earnestly, and affected Mary. Timidly she stole to the side of the grave man, and laid her little hands on his arm.

"Owen, dear ?"

He shuddered.

"You will resume your old post of guardian, and be my watcher, counsellor. I shall want your advice in everything—I wish to be the child, to be ruled by you, to feel you are the old guardian whom I loved and revered so much. In all my future steps of life—whithersoever they lead me—I will come to you to ask if you approve."

"The tie can never be again. You are your own mistress, Mary—I am not fitted to advise you."

"You must not throw me off because I—I have wished the marriage we talked of once to be no longer thought of?" implored Mary ; "try and remember the days before that—even to the very far-away days when I was a little child, and

my mother lived ! Say I am your ward again, Owen. I cannot lose you altogether."

He might have guessed all then, but he was dead to any thought of sacrifice on her part. Her earnestness moved him, even confused him, but he advanced no nearer to the truth. He held her hands in his, and looked down upon her, as he might have looked upon the little dark-haired child of Hannah Street.

"My ward !" he murmured.

They were his last words—he released her hands and looked towards the door, as though he wished her gone from him ; and Mary drew down her veil and went trembling away.

It was all over ; there were to come never again the rosy hues of life ; the frost had set in, and the flowers and fancies were frozen to the death. This was real prosaic human life now—the true world wherein men and women suffer, and give way or keep strong. She had offered this disruption of the engagement, and he had coldly accepted it, and scarcely expressed a regret.

Had there been lurking at the bottom of that enigma, a woman's heart, some dreamy hopes that she had been deceived, and that Owen would not take her at her word ?

For in the face of all dangerous truths—even of all sure conviction—true woman hopes on to the last.





## CHAPTER III.

### A FORLORN HOPE.

**S**O let it be. He accepted it as his further punishment, and bowed his head. He could have made no effort to avoid the blow—he was unprepared, and it fell. It was all on which his trust had been centered, and now it was gone, and he standing alone in the world, with a keen north-easter blowing. Perhaps it *was* for the best, as she had said; it prevented him thinking too much of the things of this life, and kept his thoughts to the one point, beyond where his duty lay. The outcast mother had prayed for a better life than her own—he would answer it by living better!

Such were a few of Owen's thoughts after the engagement was ended. He looked his disappointment in the face, and met it bravely. It was the most acute he had known, but though it rendered him more grave and silent, it did not harden him, as in the past, when the world alone offered its consolation for the blows that had fallen. From that day, as though Mary's presence had brought some counterbalance to his former asceticism, he softened and became strangely humble. He mixed more with the poor of his parish, tried the power of kind words as well as good deeds at a distance, and sought more often John Dell's advice in matters in which his friend's greater Christian knowledge could assist him.

"With such a partner as Owen," Dell said to his niece one night, six months after Glindon's death, "I ought to be a happy man. He's all that can be wished, and yet I'm discontented."

"You discontented, uncle!" answered Ruth.



"Because I'm dissatisfied with the fellow. I'm sorry to see him with so little cheerfulness—just as if his heart was heavy for its work. I think it was a mighty pity he never married Mary Chickney."

"He would have made her a good husband."

"What's man or woman alone in the world, after all?—here's the right man in one place, and the right woman in the other, and yet they never meet, and only half of life's comforts fall to their share. If the right woman could only meet Owen now!"

He looked askance at his niece as he spoke, but Ruth did not comprehend him. She could not imagine her uncle to be thinking of anyone save Mary Chickney of Oaklands. She was a widow mourning for a husband, whose virtues were great now, and whose faults were very few in her memory—she had loved him, and she was only living now for his boy. Owen was her brother, and would ever remain so.

"Why, uncle—where is the practice on your side, to give force to this preaching?"

Dell was abashed for an instant, for Ruth had never known his love-story.

"Ah! the right woman never came within arms' length, and it's too late to look for her now. I shall see after my young friend's chance instead."

So John Dell turned a manœuvring match-maker in his latter days, and did his best to bring Ruth and Owen together—but the result was not exhilarating, and like a sensible man he gave up the attempt after a time.

"That fellow will drop into a seedy bachelor like me," said Dell; "and there's before him the desolate age common to all old fogies—no children to love, no wife to nurse him, and a snuffy old woman to tuck him up when bedridden. Dashed if I don't set him an example, and marry some one myself!"

And John Dell reflected on that matter, but whether no one would have him, or he was a trifle too particular, his firm assertion came to nothing—which was a little remarkable in a man who prided himself upon always keeping his word.

Owen saw Mary occasionally. It was natural he should not pay very frequent visits to Oaklands; but in his old capacity of guardian he intruded on the Cherburys once or twice in three months. The Cherburys, mother and son, always offered him a hearty welcome, but never once alluded to the tie that had formerly brought him there so often.

happened, and never a word to fling in her face would have come from your lips. And then her, too,"—and Tarby passed his rough hand across his eyes—"she'll never call me father now—it's all up!"

"You will bear the disappointment manfully, Tarby?"

"I hope so."

"Not like a coward—surely not at the eleventh hour like a coward?"

"Well—no."

"We are both sufferers by this accident of life—let us look the future in the face, Tarby. Something may be in store for us yet."

"Ah!—who knows?"

And Tarby brightened at the sight of Owen's forced cheerfulness, and thought things might take a turn. He would not build upon it—for Owen had begged him not—but things *might*!

He was not quite so sanguine the next day, and the day following he was despondent. If it had depended on Owen it might be altered, but it depended on Mary Chickney, concerning whom he knew very little. He became poor society to his partner in business, to whom he had communicated his trouble, and who had offered his opinion in many a long-winded sentence, to which Tarby paid no heed.

Tarby became subject to meditative fits, that perplexed 92, who, finding advice no good, took to moral lectures and warnings.

"You're a-turning, Tarby—you're a-thinking of the loose again!"

"No, I aint."

"What do you sit chumping your pipe in a corner for, and saying nothing for hours, and staring at the fire as if it was full of red-hot ghosts?"

"I can't help thinking—you can't stop a fellow's thoughts."

"It's a bad sign. It's not your usual way, and so it makes a perplexibus matter of it. Supposing, now, you were to take to drinking and hitting people on the head again—hard. You'd be tied for life, and my influence at the police-court wouldn't be of much use to you."

"I suppose not," said Tarby, drily.

"I might have given you a turn if I had been on duty and buttoned tight—but all my old pals in the force are nowhere. Don't think so much, man!—let us shut up an hour earlier and go for a walk on the bridge."

"I don't mind," said Tarby, listlessly.

The shop was closed, and the two partners, with whom there was an odd but genuine affection, went into the streets, and were all the better for the walk and each other's society.

Still Tarby's meditative fits would interfere with the business, and keep 92 on the alert, and Tarby would fall more deeply into thought every day.

"I don't like to give it up without one attempt," said Tarby suddenly one day, to the amazement of 92, "and so here goes !"

"Where are you off to ?"

"To Oaklands, to see Mary."

"Lord bless the man !—what a mess he's going to make of it now."

"It's been a troubling me, 92, for months, ever since he up and told me all about it. It's been my one idea that there's a blunder somewhere, and it only wants a word. If she's her mother's girl it only wants a word !"

"You'd better let me take care of you. Let me do the head-work and the argufying, Tarby."

"Leave it to me."

"You'll let out who you are."

"Not I."

"You'll offend Owen by taking his part—you, who know no more than a babby what the row's been about."

"I'll tell her what Owen told me as *his* friend—then I shall see by her manners, her answer, where the mistake lies. 92, old fellow," cried Tarby, "if I could just be the means of their making it up now, I wouldn't mind a-dying for it !"

"You haven't got the head-work," said 92, morbidly, not to say conceitedly.

"I think I see my way."

"Well, you're obstinacious, and there's no pulling you by the collar. I sha'n't try to stop you."

"All right," said Tarby, rapidly brushing his hat the wrong way, "I'm off. Don't tell anybody which road I've gone—especially that Owen, if he should by any accident look in."

Tarby started on his expedition. He had no settled plan, no set speeches, no excuse ready for his appearance before Mary, not even a great deal of hope in his heart to encourage him in his venture. But he had brooded so long over the separation between Owen and his ward, their marriage had become so much a part of his own after-happiness, that he grew desperate, and resolved to sound to the depths.

“There can’t be much harm done ; and if Owen finds it out, and is very much offended with me, why he’ll come round in time, for the sake of the old man who’s lost so much by the quarrel.”

And consoling himself with this belief, Tarby Chickney started on his forlorn hope.





## CHAPTER IV.

### TARBY'S MISSION.

**T**ARBY arriving in the neighbourhood of Ansted, made direct for the lodge at Oaklands. He would pay his first visit to Mrs. Cutchfield, a communicative old lady, who had nursed his little Mary. She was a shrewd woman in her way, and might give him an idea as to the best method of procedure. If she were Mary's friend she might know more of the state of Mary's heart than any at the great house.

The handle of Tarby's walking-stick was rattling against the panels of the lodge door, and Mrs. Cutchfield's withered, yet still genial, face an instant afterwards made its appearance at the window.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" she said, after a careful survey of the new comer. "I was having my afternoon nap, or you wouldn't have found the door shut."

Mrs. Cutchfield having left her post of observation, opened the door to admit Tarby.

"You brought good news last time, Mr. Van Demon. I hope you deal always in the same goods?"

"As often as I can."

"Come in and sit down then. You're Mr. Owen's friend?"

"Yes—thank God!"

"I don't see what there is to thank God in that," said the old woman, shocked at his seeming irreverence.

"Because he's a good and true friend, and the article's scarce, Marm."

"That's something to be grateful for certainly, although people don't thank God for their friends very often. And how *is* that true friend of yours, Mr. Van Demon?"

"You needn't call me that name any more—my name's Brown."

"It is the name you called yourself when you first came here. What did you give a false name for?"

Tarby stammered out, "That he thought the name of Brown might confuse her," at which Mrs. Cutchfield laughed ironically.

"Brown was a friend of Owen's, you see," Tarby hastened to explain, "and Owen might have wrote about me in his letters; and so coming suddenly with news, I might have scared the dear girl."

"You're rather free, young man."

"It's my way," said Tarby—"that's all. And I have long since seen what a dear girl she is; she used to come with Owen to our shop in the Westminster Road, now and then. Lord, how she brightened it!"

"Sit down, young man, and make yourself at home. You're a man of sense, and can speak your mind honestly. Brightened it!" she cried, echoing Tarby's last words—"she brightens everything, and everything takes to loving her, as is natural and right. There isn't a man, woman, or child on the estate that she has ever said a word to, but who wouldn't go through fire and water for her. And yet she's altered."

"Altered!"

"She's lost most of her sperrits, Mr. Brown Demon," continued Mrs. Cutchfield; "there isn't the old lightness that used to make one want to dance at looking at her. She's turned more quiet in her way."

"So's Owen."

"That'll do, young man."

"What will do?" asked Tarby.

"Any talk about that friend of yours is rather disagreeable to me—I can't help it, but it raises the bile, which isn't good for one of my years," said Mrs. Cutchfield.

"Ah! you're mistook in him," said Tarby.

"I was—awfully!" was the sententious answer.

"Everybody's mistook in him that thinks as you do."

"How do you know what I'm thinking on?" sharply enquired Mrs. Cutchfield. "What's the use of your sitting there, with your greasy head against my wall, and telling me that I'm mistook?"

"You don't think Owen treated Ma— Miss Chickney well; you know you don't?" urged Tarby, who was anxious to keep the subject alive, as well as interested in his friend's defence.

"When I first knew Mr. Owen," began Mrs. Cutchfield, with much emphatic action of one finger of her hand in the palm of the other, "I took to him. For much that he has done I respects him, but for the last action of his life—it will

be his bitterest some day—I can't like him any longer, and you may tell him so."

"He has done nothing."

"He growed tired of the sweetest, dearest girl in the world; and she saw it soon enough, and flashed up a sperrit, and gave him up according. Very right and proper of her, and very mean of him to take her at her word, knowing how she was bound up in him, heart and soul. And yet he didn't care for her, only as her guardian, and it was right not to keep up the match—but oh! it was mortal hard, and I sha'n't abide the sight of the man ever any more. But you haven't come here on purpose to worry me?"

"No."

"Then why don't you say what you've come for?" said Mrs. Cutchfield, "and not delude me—a woman of few words—to going on about business that doesn't concern me. Did Mr. Owen send you here?"

"No—I came of my own accord."

"I hope your news is fresher than the last."

"Well, it is—you'll hardly believe it."

"What—what is it?" And, with some inkling of the truth, the old woman leaned forward eagerly.

"I want to tell anyone who cares to hear, that there has been a little too much hurry in breaking off the match; that Owen feels it more than he cares to own; and that seeing in him—my best friend—but a disappointed man, I thought I'd come to break the ice, or make all clear. He'll never know it—he must never know it—mind you."

"You're a-going on nicely—you are!"

"He told me a little while ago—when I pressed him—that he found the separation between him and Mary hard to bear, but that it had been Mary's wish, and he had no right to interfere."

"He—he told you so?"

"Yes; so there's a mistake, and perhaps you and I might set it right between us, and make the couple of 'em happy."

"You're a humble friend of Mr. Owen's, I take it—just as I am of that girl's—but it's a task beyond the pair of us. Who's to believe you now?"

"Eh?"

"Mary Chickney wouldn't no more believe you than Mr. Owen would be likely to think very much of all I said," observed Mrs. Cutchfield; "I don't see you can prove anything—whether, now it's all over, it mayn't be very easy to talk!"

"I'm here to do my best."

"You don't mean to——"

"See her, and just tell the truth!"

"Do you know how it will trouble her?"

"She knows me very well now—and I won't say much, and I'm very anxious about this."

"So it seems—you're looking pale enough."

"Am I?"

"And I can't make you out exactly. You're a singular man."

"A single man—of course," said Tarby, intentionally mistaking her; "and time's wasting here—and I must see her."

"You must go up to the house, then—she's at home."

"Won't she call here this afternoon—this evening?"

"She was here this morning—I don't think it likely."

"Then I'll go up at once—I'm not afraid," cried Tarby, buttoning his coat in an excited manner.

"You'd better leave it for me."

"No."

"You'll mind what you're about. She's not so strong as she used to be."

"I'll take care," said Tarby, making for the carriage drive; "wish us luck, old lady—I'm off."

Mrs. Cutchfield wished him luck, whilst standing at the lodge gate, watching his receding figure.

"What a pace he do go at, to be sure," she soliloquised; "and what an odd man he is. No," returning suddenly to her former doubts, and shaking her head vigorously, "I can't make him out exactly."

Meanwhile, the man who could not be made out put his long legs to the right purpose, and strode rapidly towards Oaklands. He would not allow himself time to think; he shut out reflection on the coming interview, lest it should unnerve him; he would chance saying the right word in the right place, rather than study his part and sink in the rehearsal. What she would think—what Owen would say—he left to the future. He had only one object then.

"I wish to see Miss Chickney," was his first address to the servant who answered his heavy single knock.

"I think she's engaged," responded the footman, after a critical examination of Tarby's attire. The functionary in waiting was more puzzled with Tarby than Mrs. Cutchfield had been—he had a vague idea that it was a respectable beggar, who had eluded Mrs. Cutchfield's vigilance, or an agent soliciting orders for a new establishment in Ansted.

"I can wait. Tell her it's Mr. Brown, from the Westminster Road, and—and look sharp, will you?"

Tarby was excited, and not particularly civil. He had



proceeded thus far, and was not inclined to be balked by a flunkey in livery. He stepped into the hall, and the servant departed with the message, and returned a few moments afterwards.

"Will you follow me, if you please, Sir?" he said, politely. Across the hall, to the drawing-room of the Cherburys, which was vacant, and wherein Tarby had to wait the coming of his daughter. The servant closed the door upon him, and Tarby, on the edge of the chair, looked round him and took a survey of the apartment.

Possibly at that time nothing could have tended more to sober him than a few minutes' patient waiting in that handsomely furnished room. To have met her suddenly might have been to betray his secret, and cause much future mortification. For his blood had become warm, and his powers of self-command more weak in consequence.

The drawing-room of the Cherburys brought him to a lower temperature. The costly furniture, the evidence throughout of wealth and taste, proved to him the immeasurable distance between his daughter and him. She was a lady of refined manners and education now, and he was a shopkeeper, and had worked in a penal settlement. It was beyond his hopes to dream of ever calling her his child, and if she never married Owen, why it was better for him.

Her entrance into the room put an end to his reverie. She came with a faint smile towards him, and extended her hand. She was calm and ladylike, and perfectly at her ease—it would be a hard task, unless he dashed through it rapidly. He saw that she was pale, and her face had lost some of its past brightness, and that alone gave him the hope that she might be touched by his defence of Owen.

"Have you come from my guardian, Mr. Brown?"

"No, Miss."

"Pray be seated," said Mary, for Tarby had risen to shake hands with her. She took a seat near him, and waited for an explanation of his visit. His anxious steadfast look towards her made her heart beat faster, though her face betrayed no outward emotion.

"I haven't come from Mr. Owen," said he, "and yet I've come to speak about him."

"Not ill?"

"No, Miss Chickney—pretty well, considering."

"Pray go on, then," said Mary, a little impatiently.

"Miss Chickney, I'm a plain man—a very plain and ignorant man, who didn't know his letters till he was nigh on forty years of age—you won't expect much ceremony from me?"

"I object to ceremony, Mr. Brown."

"I've a little to say—I want to say it well and plain, for much depends upon the proper way," he continued; "p'raps if I speak as I think, it will be the best way of managing it, Miss. I've come to speak of that old friend of mine—you and he were sweethearts eight or nine months ago."

"Sir!"

"A plain man," said Tarby, apologetically; "there are other words for it—that's the honestest. Don't find fault with my words, Miss, they're coming straight enough, but they'll be wus if you interfere with them."

"But what reason—what right have you to come hither to make this statement?" said Mary, tremblingly; "I—I do not understand you."

"One minute, Miss," said Tarby, "all plain as noonday in a minute, if you only *will* sit still! He's an old friend, as I said; there isn't in the world one like him, or one who has been such a true and faithful friend to me—and, honouring him as I do, I don't like to see him fretting. I know it aint my place to come here; I know that he would fire up to hear of it. I was sure I should offend you—a young lady unused to rough customers—and yet I come, because I see more of the truth than both of you. You and he of your own accords broke the promise made to marry each other—and you broke his heart at the same time, that's all!"

"Explain—explain!"

Mary was deathly white now, and spoke with difficulty. The man's excitement had spread to herself, and something in her throat seemed choking her. What could he mean by all these wild, earnest words—what was possible at so late an hour?

"The plain fact is, that you wished the thing broken up, and that he thought it was so much your wish—for he's a proud man—that he let it go to shivers, and said nothing! But he loved you, Ma—Miss Chickney—before the world and all living in it—I have heard it from his own lips."

"No—no—no! You are mistaken!"

"I pledge my soul upon it!" cried Tarby, vehemently; "and that's a thing I've learned to value, too. When he broke the news to me—that is, just mentioned it one day—he told me that you took the only brightness of his life away, and left him in the darkness. His words, Miss Chickney, as near as I can fix 'em."

"Great Heaven!—what have I done!"—and Mary buried her face in her hands, and rocked herself to and fro.

Tarby saw that she was moved. Could he push too far his

advantage, he thought. He left his chair, and came close to her side.

"Will you, for my old friend's sake, go to him in his misery, and tell him what a mistake it *was*?—he only wants one true word from you, I know."

"What—what does he think of me?" she murmured.

"That you were tired of him—that you feared trusting-like your happiness to him altogether—that you hardly knew your mind—which you did, my dear—didn't you?" he asked, with intense eagerness.

"I would have died for him!" she cried. "It was his happiness, not mine—I had no faith in—but—but Mrs. Glindon—he must love her, Sir?"

"What!—before you?—damned nonsense!"

Mary was brought to herself by this rejoinder. She began to think that she had betrayed too much of her secret in this man's presence—so eccentric and so rough a man to be Owen's friend. And he, in his desire to see Owen happy, might have exaggerated matters, and given a false colouring to some commonplace conversation that had taken place between them. And yet he was earnest, and had come a long distance, on his own responsibility, to relate the truth. Owen would no more have dreamed of this man, as ambassador of peace between them, than she would have thought of it five minutes before their meeting.

And, after all, what did it matter? The words had been spoken; time—that changes so many things—had raised its barriers in the way; there had been spring flowers and summer fruits since then, and her heart had been sorely tried in many ways, concerning which this well-meaning friend knew nothing. If he had only stood there at her side three months—even three days ago!

"You are very kind to take so much interest in Owen's welfare."

"And in yours, Miss—pray think that!"

"And in mine, then," she continued; "but for any good that might follow such an effort, it is too late, Sir!"

"Not too late, Miss Chickney—it can't be!"

"Other duties—perhaps, other wishes—have arisen since I thought it best to annul my engagement with my guardian," she said, sadly.

"There can't be anything in the way big enough to stop the love between you both—there oughtn't be, by rights. Miss Chickney, I shall tell all to Owen, and leave him to act. All that I have heard to-day will bring him new life."

"You must tell him nothing!" cried Mary.

"I know what is best !"

"It will only add to his misery now," said Mary, sadly ;  
"for before this Mr. Cherbury has seen him."

"Seen him ?—what of that ?"

Tarby gasped for breath as he looked into her face. It was still very pale ; but there was firmness thereon—firmness to bear all and complain not. There was a moment's hesitation after Tarby's enquiry—then she said :

"Well, you will see how expedient it is to keep this interview a secret from Mr. Owen. Mr. Cherbury has asked me to become his wife !"

"And you—and you ?"

"Leave such matters to my guardian !" said she, icily.  
"If he give his consent, I will obey him."

Tarby sunk back into his chair. It was the last blow—the cruel blow that he had seen impending and yet had not prepared against. There was an end to more fair hopes than Owen's !

"I will go now," said he, as he rose unsteadily ; "I see that ends it ! I wasn't prepared—he won't be prepared—for quite such awful news. That's another wrong step, Miss Chickney."

"I am the best judge," was the answer.

"I say it's wrong !"

"Have you a right to express an opinion ?" she asked with some haughtiness ; "or are you not even exceeding the privilege of a friend ?"

"Right—right !"

And, thus checked, Tarby went with his downcast head, across the room, like some animal chided by its harsh master might have done. He lingered at the door, as if anxious to say more ; but Mary, struggling to be calm to the last, opened the French window and passed into the garden. Tarby went his way, without another word.





## CHAPTER V.

### "COUP DE THEATRE."

**Y**ES, Mr. Cherbury had asked Mary Chickney to become his wife. For so many years a bachelor, dead apparently to all the blandishments of the sex ; and then suddenly evincing a desire to gather the fairest flower he had met with in his pilgrimage and wear it in his breast. Fifty years and more a bachelor—time enough to have wedded and had children of Mary's age around him—and then in the autumn of his life to feel a passion for his mother's *protégée*. But such things have happened before, and will happen again—love is not limited to fifty years, and December will attempt the conquest of May often with more success in life than in three-volume story-books.

He had been timid in his wooing, and kept much in the background. He had won Mary's confidence by these means, and then he had very plainly, and in a very matter-of-fact way, offered her his hand, stated his prospects, spoken just a little of the great happiness to him that would ensue from such a marriage. He knew the match was at an end between Owen and her, and he stepped forward to propose.

This occurred a week before Tarby's visit to Oaklands, and a very miserable week it had been for poor Mary. Mr. Cherbury did not require an answer till the week had expired—he left her to consider the alliance in all its varied aspects, previous to committing herself to a reply. In that week Mrs. Cherbury took his case in hand, and pleaded both directly and indirectly for her son.

Such a marriage between the two whom she loved best in the world, lay naturally next Mrs. Cherbury's heart. The engagement was dissolved between the guardian and ward ;

there was no ingratitude to Owen in seeking to provide Mary with a rich and an affectionate husband.

She pleaded very earnestly for her Isaac—spoke of the great improvement in his manners, the absence of his old hypochondriacal fits, and of that morbidity naturally allied to them—the influence that Mary had exercised to rouse him to a life that was as different from that of six years ago, as six years ago was different from his youth.

"If you had only known him in the past, Mary," Mrs. Cherbury said, "and could but see the change you have effected, you would be proud of your work. You have made him more of a son to me—you have always been to this house a blessing. And, Mary dear," she argued, "if you would think seriously of his offer, you would lighten my heart so much. I don't ask you—he does not ask you—to marry him at once; but to give yourself time—a long time if you wish—before you become his wife. Take him on probation, and turn him off at a moment's notice, if your heart fail you, not studying his happiness or my own. I know he is not a romantic lover for a girl of your age—but what is romance, but a fussy state of things sober folk are better without. But, Mary, I am sure he will make you one of the best of husbands; that he will not be an exacting man, expecting too much affection from you: that yours will be a quiet peaceful life, and will bring much of peace and content to every one allied to you. Why, my dear, dear Mary, you will be my own daughter then in earnest!"

"I—I will think of it."

"And don't judge hastily—take the full week to consider—remember, however much I wish it, your happiness stands first of all. If you fear to trust it with Isaac, why there's an end of it, and of all my dreams, which I had even before I thought Mr. Owen had dispelled them for ever."

Mary took the full week to consider, and asked no advice of the world. Neither Owen nor Mrs. Cutchfield guessed what was troubling her. Owen would know in good time—to Owen she would leave the final decision respecting it, and be guided by him entirely—she had only now to consider what she should do if the consent of her guardian were given to the engagement. He had said at one time, "for once and ever No," to such a match; but then he loved her then, or fancied that he did so! He had only to say "No," after all, again. She did not dislike Mr. Cherbury; he had always been kind and respectful, and interested in her; she had every reason to believe that he would do his best to make her happy; that not a wish of her life, which love or money could pro-

cure, would remain ungratified. She never hoped to love any one like Owen again—she would tell whoever might be her husband that disagreeable fact—but she felt she could be a good and faithful wife to one who would be kind to her. She was at an age when the first romance—or the first fussy state of things, as Mrs. Cherbury phrased it—had been dashed from her path, and in the reaction she felt inclined to regard things a little too prosaically. It was a mere question of making other people happy—she had given up thinking for herself.

Then came the question, who most deserved the sacrifice of her life, and whom could she most greatly benefit? All Mrs. Cherbury's arguments returned with extra force in this emergency—for Mrs. Cherbury had raised her from a humble station to a high position, been a mother to her, lavished upon her all a mother's love. She had spared no pains to bring her up a lady, fitted to grace any circle; she had made no mystery of the fact, even to Isaac Cherbury, that all the money she had to leave in the world would become Mary's at her death. So much affection for her, and interest in her future, had long since won upon Mary's gentle heart, and here was an opportunity to evince her gratitude.

Well, perhaps the romance of Mary's life had not all died away, and there was something romantic, if morbid, in the sacrifice she contemplated. It was almost like a heroine to take Isaac Cherbury, out of love for his mother, and set herself the hard task of obeying and honouring a man of fifty years of age. Surely a shade of romance lingered in her thoughts, when she pictured Owen and Ruth marrying, and their meeting her some day as Mrs. Cherbury,—little thinking she had chosen that fate in preference to dividing two such faithful lovers!

Yes, she would think for others—for all who had been kind and generous to her—and she would accept Mr. Cherbury under certain conditions, which she made known to him that morning previous to Tarby's visit. Oh! if she had had but a friend as earnest in her defence in the times that had vanished for ever!

"Mr. Cherbury," said she, in answer to his great question of a week ago, "I must refer you to my guardian; in his hands I leave the disposal of my future. If he consent to an engagement between us, I am willing; but you will not press me to end that engagement too readily—you will give me time to regard my future position as your wife. This is a poor reply to make to an offer of your hand, Sir—will you be content with it?"

"Miss Chickney, you alter my whole life," said Mr. Cherbury, warmly; "I have never expected—never deserved—such happiness."

And Mr. Cherbury, for the first time in the reader's experience of him, really looked happy. There was hardly a crease in his forehead, and his naturally heavy head felt so light, that he was doubtful whether it was on his shoulders or not.

"My dear mother, it's a new existence," said he, when he and Mrs. Cherbury were together; "I don't feel the same man."

"I'm sure you're not."

"I want everybody to be shaking hands and congratulating me," said he; "it's a stroke of good fortune that I have never anticipated."

"Ah! and it's as well you didn't marry early. How I used to worry you about it, Isaac."

"Yes—didn't you. And I used to make out my head was twice as bad as it was, in order to keep you quiet."

"It's going back thirty years."

"No—don't say that," he said, quickly; "all the past we live down. Haven't I just said it's a new existence?"

"My dear Isaac—you're too buoyant."

"I must see or write to Mr. Owen at once—how surprised he will be!"

"Yes."

"Perhaps sorry?" suggested Isaac, with a doubtful look towards his mother.

"Not if it be all true that people talk about," said Mrs. Cherbury; "for if he's going to marry Mrs. Glindon presently, why, he will be glad to resign his trust to your hands. It will be a great relief to him to see a chance of her settling comfortably in life."

"Ye—es," said Isaac, still doubtfully; "if he were not such a strange man, perhaps it would be."

Isaac Cherbury remembered an interview in the past, when Owen's stern, decisive manner startled him, even touched him—and he was a hard man at that time. What a change since then!—the man of wealth thinking timidly of an anxious conference with the youth he had suspected of dishonesty—the youth to have the power, by a word, to mar his future hopes. It took him two hours' deliberation as to the best method of procedure—he began a letter to Owen, soliciting an interview on important business, and asking him to fix a day; then he relinquished that idea, and resolved to start at once in search of him. He would strike whilst the iron was hot, and decide everything at once.



So the train that took Tarby to Ansted passed the train bearing the new lover to London. Two men full of thoughts concerning Mary Chickney went different ways—each thinking he knew what was best for her !

Mr. Cherbury was inclined to have an attack of headache when he neared Owen's private apartments. There was a mere matter-of-fact routine to go through ; but considering all things just at that moment, he would have preferred breaking the ice by letter, he thought. The guardian was a strange young man — had such awkwardly piercing eyes — and his answer *was* doubtful ! What if he had loved Mary Chickney after all, and had never thought of Mrs. Glindon — what if he were cherishing the idea of renewing the engagement ? And then, again, between this Mr. Owen and himself, there had always been a certain amount of coolness. He had tried to break it down long since, but the young man, though he thawed at times, as quickly congealed again, as if ashamed of his weakness. Was it possible that Owen had never forgiven the past suspicions of him, and would resent it at such a time — and in such a way ?

It made him pause to reflect on the matter ; in younger days he might have acted thus himself, and flung back the scorn on him who had humiliated him ; but still he did not believe any revengeful feeling would influence Owen in his answer. He felt relieved, however, to hear from the servant that Mr. Owen was still at business — it gave him more time to consider. He thought of waiting quietly in Mr. Owen's apartments for our hero's return, until the landlady apprised him that they were very busy at the factory, and Mr. Owen seldom returned till late in the evening.

Mr. Cherbury obtained the address, and sauntered slowly on his way thither. There was no occasion for hurry now — Owen was at his business, he would be sure to meet him. He could not understand what made him so singularly nervous about this interview. A few years back and he had been a stoic that nothing could move. And a girl of eighteen had worked the miracle in him, or made a fool of him, he was somewhat doubtful which.

Presently he caught himself leaning against a post a few yards from the factory of Messrs. Dell and Co., and surveying the gates with a rueful expression of countenance. And his head ? — great Heaven, how it was going it under his hat ! And that hat ! — it must have weighed seven or eight pounds. Memorandum — to change his hat-maker directly he went to the West End.

Mr. Isaac Cherbury mustered courage, and rang the great

bell-handle. He was startled by the face of a porter who had once been in his own service.

"Is Mr. Owen within?"

"Yes, Mr. Cherbury."

"Will you present my card to him, and say that I am anxious for a few minutes private conversation, on business of importance?"

The man touched his hat and withdrew, leaving Mr. Cherbury in the great paved yard.

It was like the old times to stand in such a place of business, and hear the hammers ringing on the iron, and see, from half-opened doors, the glare of furnace fires, and note, some distance down the yard, the preparations for hoisting a large engine on its truck. He seemed to stand apart from stirring life, to have waxed very old, and left money-making and engineering to younger heads and hands. But he had retired from business, the old firm had degenerated, and this new and thriving one was the creation of two of his former servants.

Round goes the world and the pigmies on its surface, and every revolution makes a change. Here was the master coming to the servant to ask permission to marry—the master who was more than fifty years of age!

The porter returned.

"Please to step this way, Mr. Cherbury."

The die was cast, and there was no retreating. Mr. Cherbury put a bold face on the matter, or rather his old stolid-looking countenance thereon; he could assume it at will, it appeared. He followed the man through the counting-house to the private room of the partners—grim and wooden-visaged looked he; far more like a man going to be hanged than married.

His colour changed, and his looks betrayed he was not at his ease, when he found himself in the private room, wherein sat John Dell as well as Owen. A heap of papers was on the table, and Dell, with his hair very rough and his eyes very protuberant, sat with a plan before him, poring earnestly into its details. Owen stood at the back, and had been evidently studying the plan also over the shoulder of the senior partner.

Mr. Cherbury extended his hand and shook that of Owen's. John Dell did not look up from the plan, despite the intent gaze directed to him by his former master.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Owen, I thought you might possibly spare me a few minutes private conversation," said Mr. Cherbury; "ahem—good-afternoon, Mr. Dell."

Dell muttered something in reply—it might be a recognition of the salutation ; but it sounded more like a canine growl before “feeding time.”

“You may speak here with perfect confidence,” said Owen.

“Yes—I have no doubt of that, but——”

“Shall I go ?” was the abrupt enquiry of the senior partner, as he turned halfway in his seat to look Owen in the face.

“Keep your seat ; we need not disturb your plans, that I can see. Mr. Cherbury, I repeat that you may speak here with perfect confidence ; there is not a secret in my life that I have not shared with this old friend.”

“Thank you, Owen—thank you !” muttered Dell.

“Oh ! I have no doubt of that,” said Mr. Cherbury, politely ; “but—but the fact is, I have not come on business—not strictly business.”

“I thought it was business of an important nature.”

“Exactly ; but not business of this sort” — and he gave a general sweep with his hand, implying engineering business, etc.

“This is our only private room—the counting-house is occupied by the clerks, and the premises are somewhat small. Will you allow me to call at Oaklands this evening, Mr. Cherbury ?”

“Yes !” was the eager response.

Owen considered the business settled ; he asked a few questions concerning the health of his ward and Mrs. Cherbury, and glanced over the shoulder of Dell at the diagrams—a significant hint that Mr. Cherbury was not disposed to take.

Owen was conscious of being cold, almost repellent to this visitor. Against his will, it seemed as if he must be distant in his manner towards him. He strove to be courteous and at his ease ; but a feeling of distrust, as to the motive that had brought Mr. Cherbury from Ansted, gathered strength with every instant. Still, he was Mrs. Cherbury’s son, and Mrs. Cherbury had been Mary’s friend, and both mother and son had always received him graciously at Oaklands.

“I—I think it will be hardly necessary to take you so much out of your way,” said Mr. Cherbury, after a long pause ; “if you will do me the favour of a private interview. My business concerns your—your ward.”

“Then, Mr. Cherbury, I ask my partner, as a favour, to allow me to be present at that interview,” said Dell, sternly —“to advise him, if it be necessary, upon many difficult points which may arise.”

“But, Sir——”

"I leave it to Owen!"

And John Dell turned to his plans. Owen was somewhat perplexed at Dell's manner—it was new and striking. He could not attribute idle curiosity to his partner, and he could see no valid reason for his absence.

"Mr. Cherbury, there is nothing that you can say to me concerning my ward in which Mr. Dell—her friend as well as ours—will not be interested."

"Very well."

Mr. Cherbury had some spirit of his own, and Owen's persistence brought it to the surface. There was nothing of which he had to be ashamed, and John Dell might sit there a listener if he liked, and if his partner could see no breach of etiquette in pressing a third person into the conference. Something unpleasant might even transpire—for that Dell was an eccentric person, as well as Mr. Owen. Dell had served his father and him many years; and then, in defiance of a contract, the strict reading of which Mr. Cherbury had not insisted upon, had thrown up his engagement at a moment's notice, and without a word of explanation, save what might be gathered from the following angry words:

"I will not do a stroke more of work in a house that bears your name!"

Cherbury had set it down as a protest against his conduct respecting Owen, and pocketed the inconvenience of suddenly losing a good foreman.

Still, he would make his statement now; he had a right, he thought, to have his proposal fairly entertained.

"Mr. Owen," he began, with a perspicacity that was singularly in contrast to his former hesitation, "the simple matter is, that I love your ward. An old lover, you may say—one who has beaten about the world a great deal, and is too hard and phlegmatic a suitor for one so young as Miss Chickney; but still, believe me, Mr. Owen, one who will do his very best to make her life a happy one. Aware that Mary confides in you, and is governed by your wishes, I come to solicit your consent to pay my addresses to her."

Owen's brow contracted, and as he leaned against the mantelpiece Mr. Cherbury could see his hands clutch the shelf quickly.

"I am aware," he hastened to add, "that such a topic is painful to you, and that it might have been better discussed between us without——"

"No, no!—best as it is, Sir!" interrupted Owen.

"I am aware, of course, of the old relations that have existed between you and Miss Chickney, and how it adds to

the pain of this discussion," he continued ; "but I could not spare you, without laying myself open to the charge of working against you in the dark. Frankly I communicated the state of my feelings to your ward — frankly I have come to you."

"Thank you," answered Owen.

John Dell was rolling up his plan with a ferocious expression of visage ; but neither Mr. Cherbury nor Owen immediately noticed this movement.

"May I ask," said Owen, after a pause, "if my ward has referred you to me?"

"She has."

"And that, having obtained my consent, she is prepared to look upon you as her future husband?"

"She is."

"Dell," turning to his friend with a curling lip, "do you understand these women's ways? They are a mystery to me."

Dell shrugged his shoulders, and rolled his plans together more tightly than ever.

"I will speak presently," he said.

Mr. Cherbury gave one startled look in his direction, and then addressed himself to Owen.

"She will trust her life to my care ; she will gladden mine, which has been a desolate one hitherto, such as no man need envy. Mr. Owen, may I ask your answer?"

"I will not stand in your way, Sir."

"Owen !" cried Dell, leaping up ; but Owen caught his arm.

"Patience," said Owen, "you have no voice here, or in this matter. I am jealous of my guardianship, and I have a little more to say."

"Go on."

And Dell leaned against the mantelpiece also, keeping his eyes on Mr. Cherbury.

"I may think this an unwise step—a premature one on the part of my ward—but as I considered her, nearly two years since, capable of judging for herself in my favour, I cannot consistently interfere in yours. My guardianship, at the best, is merely nominal. At her wish she retains the name of ward ; but I have no right to interfere with any step in life that she may consider leads her nearer to content. I believe you will do your best to make her happy?"

"I will."

"Were I a more conceited man I might feel aggrieved at this new engagement—it is so great a contrast to that which she mysteriously broke in my case. I might think my youth

to be preferred before your mature years, and my love before that weak flame which must flicker in the heart of a man of the world like you ; but I have given up woman's study. I say again, it is beyond my comprehensive powers."

"I regret to hear you speak thus bitterly," said Mr. Cherbury ; "it is scarcely fair to your ward."

"You are right—I stand reprovèd."

"Owen !" cried Dell, "you love Mary still—you have always loved her ?"

"What of that ?"

"You don't deny it ?"

"No."

"And yet you give your consent to that man taking her for his wife—you !"

"I have no real voice in the matter—Miss Chickney thinks she will be happy with him. Mr. Cherbury," turning to that gentleman, "there's my hand to the bargain."

Mr. Cherbury stepped forward to take Owen's hand—their hands had scarcely met, when Dell struck them apart with his own.

"Not yet !"

Cherbury and Owen both looked towards him indignantly.

"Man of self, don't you hear this partner of mine say that he loves her ?—cannot you imagine that some mistake, which a word might rectify, has led to this unhappy entanglement ?"

"Mr. Owen has not asked me to resign in his favour. It cannot be expected——"

"No matter—no matter," interrupted Dell, impetuously ; "it was not for that reason I wished to stay and offer my advice. Mr. Cherbury, give her up."

"Sir ?"

"Ask your own conscience if you are worthy of a pure and innocent girl's affection—and if the match be not more frightfully disproportionate in morals than in years. Man, I knew your heart and all its workings eight years since — and flung away from you in disgust. Shall I unmask you here ?"

Cherbury had turned pale, but he still preserved his calmness.

"Say on, Sir. To what you know or may have heard of me, I may offer a defence, or give the lie."

"You will claim Owen's ward ?"

"Yes."

"You stand his rival," pointing to Owen—"he has owned it !"

"I cannot help it."

"*You are the rival of your own son !*"

"Dell!" cried two voices in his ears.

"Between him and his happiness, as between *her* and her chance of heaven you stand. It is a fitting end to a life such as yours has been."

"Dell, what does this mean?" Owen almost shrieked; "are you in your senses?—how is that man my father?"

"He was the man who ruined a trusting woman and brought her to the streets—she told me the name the day before you went to Australia, Owen; and the story of her wrongs drove her back to drink that night, when I thought in my blind egotism that I had touched her heart a little. Thirty years ago in Markshire he led your mother to ruin, and the sin starts again in judgment before him.

Mr. Cherbury sank into a chair and buried his face in his hands. It was the whole truth, long set aside and attempted to be forgotten, and now in that night rising sternly before him. He had sinned and in his way he had repented long since; he had not thought of his "early indiscretions"—that was the fine name he gave them—till some years back, when a woman's face rose before him in all its haggardness and horror, and he knew how much of it was his work. It had changed and aged him, and rendered him a nervous man—but it had been fled from, not sought out in a repentant spirit. His victim was clamouring at his own factory gates one day, demanding to see her son—"a young thief from the cradle, called Owen"—but he had not guessed Owen's mother to have been his own victim. He had been told of the visit by his clerks, and rendered suspicious of a faithful servant, whose life he might have marred like the mother's. But the mother and he, since his desertion of her, had not spoken a word—had only once crossed each other's path when she had been too drunk to recognise her betrayer. Still the sin had haunted him—he had tried to live it down, and now in that hour it had arisen in a more awful shape than ever.

"Your false name did not screen you," said Dell; "years back, when her son was attempting her repentance—on the day I learned her story—she had discovered the clue to her seducer's real name and position, and the old wrongs stirring within her, made her fly back to the night. I left your service the next day—you may guess the reason now."

"And *her* end?" moaned Cherbury.

"Was peace."

"God be thanked—I am less a miserable man!"

He had not uncovered his face yet, and Dell, whose excitement was subsiding, felt for the man's agony of mind. Cher-

bury had wrecked all his hopes, but Dell was an unrevenged man and a Christian, and any sign of a contrite spirit naturally touched him.

"I think I would go now," he suggested, in a milder tone ;  
"your presence is painful here—very painful."

"Yes—I will go."

"Think of all that has happened to-night, and what is best," said Dell.

Cherbury rose, and went towards the door.

"Be grateful to your God that this son, unrecognised, unknown, uncared for by you, was saved from the mother's life by Mary Chickney's mother. He has lived to prosper in this world, and has faith in a higher. Go."

"You are a hard man."

"You do me an injustice."

He stood at the door, looking at Owen—looking very, very wistfully towards the son ! He passed from the room, but only to return again with hasty steps.

"Owen, will you shake hands with me ?"

"Yes."

And the hands of father and son were clasped together for a moment, before Isaac Cherbury hurried from the room.







## CHAPTER VI.

### CLEARs THE STAGE.

**O**WEN did no more work that day. Early in the evening, before the gas-lamps were lighted in the streets, he sat in his room pondering over the events of the day. A day of much bewilderment and mystery, leaving behind a night not easy to penetrate.

He could not see, he could not guess what lay beyond the boundary of that day; the shock of his father's revelation appeared to have benumbed his feelings utterly. He sat by the open window looking into the Kennington Road, and let his thoughts run riot, and inextricably confuse his judgment. There was an uncomfortable pulsation at his temples that he could not free himself from, and that interfered with sober reasoning.

His landlady knocked once or twice at the door, to know if he would have the lamp lighted, and he had said "No, he was not busy—leave him to himself." The night air stole into the room; darkness settled in the streets; clocks in the neighbourhood chimed in vain for him, and told him of time's waste—the stream of workers, pleasure-seekers, castaways flowed on beneath his window—the policeman stopped more than once to look suspiciously towards him.

The figure of a man stood at the iron gate, staring up at the window, at nine o'clock, as puzzled as the policeman had been at the darkened room in the first floor, and the man's face there now very dimly seen. The watcher opened the gate, and came on to the little patch of turf, to observe things more closely.

"Is that you, Owen?" he called twice, before the thoughtful face looked down upon him.

"Who's below there?" enquired a deep voice.

"Tarby."

"I am tired to-night—will you come to-morrow?"

"No, I must speak to you now," said Tarby firmly.

"Come up, then."

Tarby knocked at the door, was admitted by the landlady, and went up stairs into Owen's room.

"What are you sitting in the dark for?" he asked.

"Short of work, Tarby. Sit down, if you can find a chair."

"Will you have the lamp now, Mr. Owen?" enquired the landlady, who had followed Tarby into the room.

"Oh! the lamp again!" said Owen, peevishly; "bring it if you like."

Both men looked instinctively towards each other when the bright oil lamp was brought into the room—each saw a white and haggard face. Owen started to see Tarby so changed, and a fear of a relapse made him ejaculate, as the door closed,

"What's wrong, Tarby?"

"Everything's wrong, so far as we're concerned, Owen."

"What makes you think this?"

"It's all up with my hopes—and with yours, perhaps," said he. "You've been and seen Mr. Cherbury, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"And he has asked to marry Mary, and you've said 'Yes'?" Tarby asked, quickly.

"How did you learn all this?"

"Never mind, just now—is it the truth?"

"The plain truth, Tarby."

"It must be stopped—I say it shall be stopped. It isn't fair, or right, to Mary and yourself."

"I don't know how it will end—don't weary me."

"Owen, I saw the blessed girl to-day. I couldn't stand it any longer, so I went to Oaklands."

"You!"

Tarby nodded.

"Go on."

"And I spoke of you, and how hard it had been on you this last——"

"Tarby, you're a fool!" shouted Owen. "By what right did you seek her out? What right have you to thrust yourself before me, and pain that innocent girl, by mentioning my name? You are a meddler and a spy!"

"By the right of a father and a friend, if you must know," said Tarby, with a quiet dignity, that disarmed Owen at once—"by the wish to see the daughter happy, and not selling

herself for a grand house and a carriage! Haven't I the right to take an interest in you both?"

"Yes. Pardon me, old friend—I am in the wrong," said Owen, offering his hand. "I am always in the wrong. It's my fate!"

Tarby held Owen's hand firmly in his, whilst he said,

"You were in the wrong when you took her at her word. You let her go, and her heart was all yours, Owen. She only feared your happiness—not her own."

"Folly!"

"She owed as much."

"She did!" cried Owen, trembling strangely. "Go on!"

"She thought, or heard, that you had, all your lifetime, loved Dell's niece—and she was free, and you were unhappy."

"Yes—I see it all!"

Owen walked to the window, and then resumed his old post. He was suffocating in that room, and the cool night air brought but a faint relief. He saw it all then—what he had missed, and all that he had been mistaken in. How by a word the error which had deceived Mary might have been set straight, and her heart spared many bitter pangs. She was impetuous, and he was proud—and so they had drifted apart, and a wild sea of doubt and misconstruction separated them farther from each other every day. He sprang to his feet again.

"Tarby, I shall go to Oaklands at once!"

"Well said—I'll go with you."

"If I have no hope how this may end, I will at least do Mary justice, and assure her that there was no pitying element in my affection. I cannot stay here a moment longer."

"Better not, p'raps."

"What is the time?"

"Half-past nine."

"We shall not be at Oaklands till close on eleven, and they'll all be a-bed," added Tarby; "still we shall be near them in the morning, and can begin early."

"Come on!"

Owen would have done anything that night for action. Sitting still was to wait for madness to steal on him. Leaving the lamp for his landlady to extinguish Owen ran down stairs, followed by Tarby. The door was closed behind them, and they were in the forecourt, when two figures stopped at the gate—that of a man and woman.

"This can't be, surely!" said Tarby; "and yet — yet it is!"

Owen stood endeavouring to collect his thoughts, as the gate opened, and Mr. Cherbury, with Mary on his arm, advanced towards him.

"What does this mean?" he gasped.

"Owen, she knows all, and has been very anxious to see you. Am I right in bringing her?"

"Yes!"—then he opened his arms and Mary leaped into them, and cried and trembled there.

"I think you and I can afford to leave this young couple to themselves a bit!" suggested Tarby to Mr. Cherbury.

"I think so."

Tarby ran up the steps, and speedily brought the landlady to the door by his incessant knocking.

"Mr. Owen's altered his mind—stand out of the way, Marm! he and his young lady are going up stairs!"

Tarby was in an ecstasy of delight; he jumped down the flight of steps again, and pulled Owen by the arm.

"Talk it over for a minute or two, and get the agony over! I'll attend to this old cove!" said he. "Owen, my lad, I'm a younger man by twenty years!"

Owen took Tarby's hint, and Tarby was left in the forecourt with Mr. Cherbury—a gentleman whom he had not before had the pleasure of seeing. They were two fathers, each ignorant of the other's relationship.

"It's a mercy they're together at last!" said Tarby.

"Yes."

"It was very kind of you to help to bring them so—I take it!" said Tarby; "to give her up when you might have married her yourself!"

"Oh for the past back again in my hands!"

"Eh?"

"Nothing—nothing—how frightfully my head aches!"

"Nothing like cold water for the headache, Sir!"

"I never tried it."

"There's a pump at the 'Hercules'—come and have a turn now, and I'll work the handle. It will pass away the time a bit."

But whether Mr. Cherbury availed himself of Tarby's liberal offer, appears not in the chronicle of Owen's history.

And Owen and Mary? Is it fair to the great body of novel-readers, to skip so fine an opportunity for a love-scene?—to pass over with a few comments a reconciliation of lovers—an event dear to actors and audience? And yet it is easily imagined—and love-scenes are very much alike, and happen every day! In the life without, as well as in the life in books, heart speaks to heart, and the flimsy veils of

disguise, misconception, reserve, are floated away by the strong winds of true passion. Still we linger with them, and at their side. There are some old subjects that are always new, and that years hence as to-day will be undying. It was ever a new subject to Owen and Mary—when they had children clustering round their knees, and they were becoming peaceful heads of a large family, the story of that reconciliation made them young again. They lived it over anew. The autumn night, the lamp upon the table, the half-opened window whence the stars were seen, were the still life of the photograph—the slight figure pressed to the breast of the strong man, and both talking of forgiveness and pride and error, and each anxious to take all the blame, and both so happy, were the real throbbing existence of the picture. Close in the ear, as they seemed vibrating in the heart, sounded the vows to be true henceforth, and have no doubts of each other. To love for ever and be happy ever afterwards—life to end like the pleasant old fairy-books. Life to begin, too, full of faith in each other, with courage for this world, and a hope for the next—forgetting not, amidst their present contentment, the ruling Hand that had steered them on to the haven.

Before the pen drops, one more picture. A church in the Waterloo Road; a crowd of men, women, and children from the streets adjacent hanging round the smoke-begrimed portico; the little knot of characters who have had life within this book, or to whom we have attempted to impart some semblance of existence, gathered before the altar. Owen and Mary, John Dell and his niece, Cherbury and his mother, Tarby and 92, honest Mrs. Cutchfield, are all there. To the words, "Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?" Owen makes a sign to Tarby, and Tarby, confused yet happy, obeys the signal, and, to Mary's surprise, tremblingly places her hand in Owen's.

After the marriage, and before they pass down the broad aisle to the carriages waiting to take them back to Oaklands—to the wedding-feast given by the father who has begged hard to call Owen his son—Owen passes with Mary through a side door in the vestry to the churchyard; Tarby, struggling with his breath, follows slowly behind them—the weight that had been chained to his feet in times past seems there again!

Standing by the grave of Mary Chickney, late of Hannah Street, Owen in a few words throws a light upon the mother's story, and points to the man wistfully regarding them. Mary turns and flings herself upon his neck, and Tarby holds

her to his heart as he held her when she cried to go there nineteen years ago ! He would have knelt to kiss the hem of her garment if Owen had allowed it !

“God bless you both !” he murmurs.

And with that blessing the wedding-bells peal forth, and life lies fair before them.

THE END.



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